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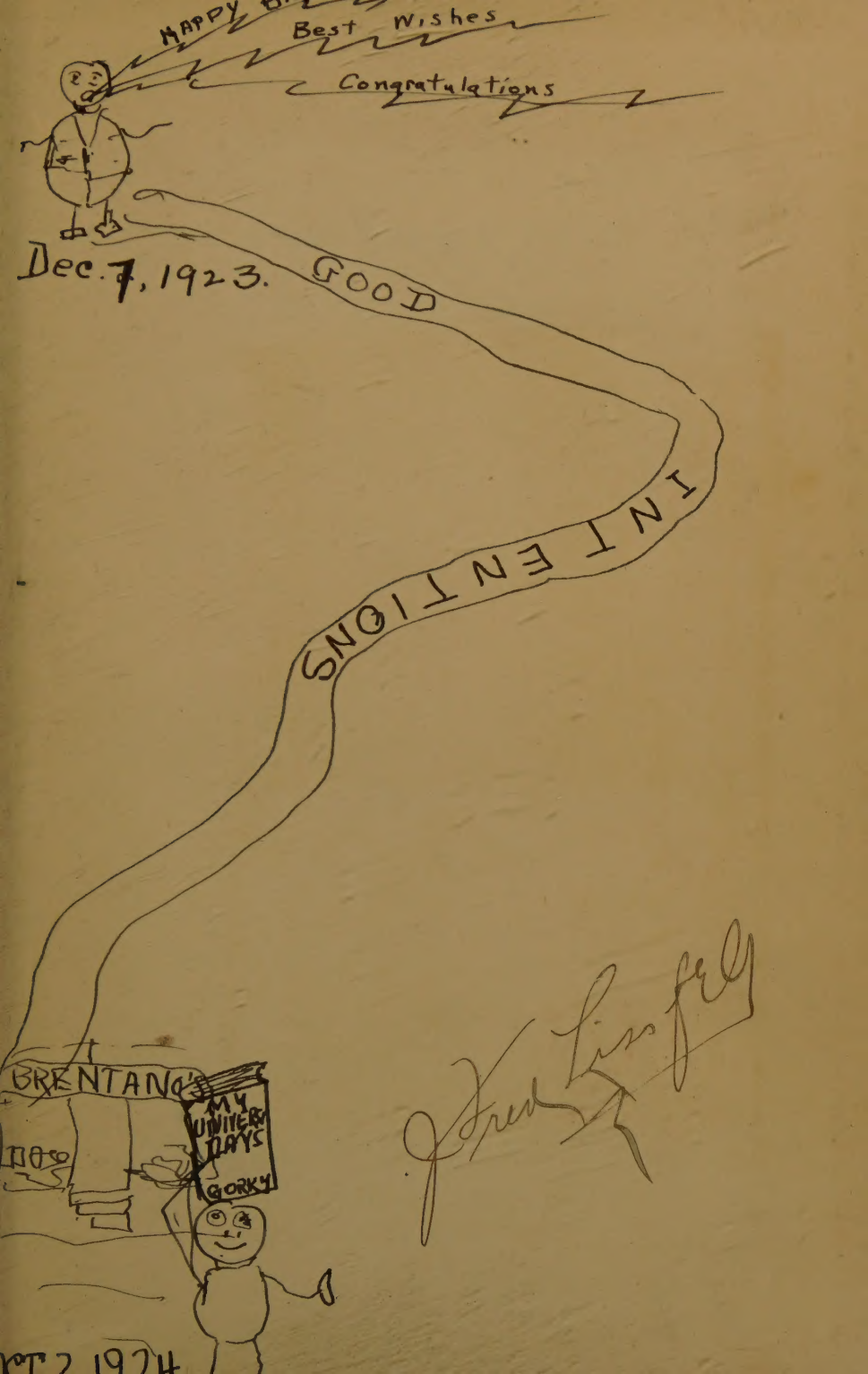
HAPPY
Best Wishes
Congratulations
Dec. 7, 1923.
GOOD
INTENTIONS
BRENTANO'S
MY WINTER DAYS
GORKY

MY UNIVERSITY DAYS

MY UNIVERSITY DAYS

BY

MAXIM GORKY

BONI & LIVERIGHT
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MY UNIVERSITY DAYS

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I

AND so I am going to Kazan; to study at the university; nothing less than that.

It was the student Nikolai Yevreinov, a gentle handsome lad, with the caressing eyes of a woman, who inspired me with the idea of going to the university. He lived in the garret of the house where I roomed, and saw me frequently with a book under my arm, and this interested him. We became acquainted, and Yevreinov soon began to convince me that I "possessed exceptional qualifications for science."

"You are destined by nature to serve science," he would say, gracefully shaking his long mane of hair.

Then I did not know that one could serve science in the capacity of a rabbit, and Yevreinov demonstrated to me so clearly that the universities were in need of exactly such young men as I. Naturally the spirit of Michael Lomonosov [1] was called up for the argument. Yevreinov said that in Kazan I could live with him, go through the usual school courses during the autumn and winter, pass "a few" examinations. That is how he put it, "a few." And once in the university I would be granted a scholarship and five years later emerge as a scientist. All this seemed very

[1] Lomonosov was the first scientist in Russia and lived in the 18th century. Translator's note.

simple to Yevreinov who was only nineteen years old and kind of heart.

After passing his examinations he departed. And very soon after that, I followed him.

My grandmother gave me some sound advice as she saw me off:

"Don't be angry with people—you are always angry, you have become stern and aggressive. You get this from your grandfather; well—what good came to him of that? He lived in that way and finished like a fool, the poor old man. Remember one thing: 'Tis not God who judges people—the devil does that. Well, good-bye. . . ." And wiping scanty tears from her brown shrivelled cheeks, she said:

"I know that we shall never meet again; you, a restless creature, will stray far away, and I shall die . . ."

Lately I had seen little of the dear old lady and now I suddenly felt that never again will a human being become so close to me, so near to my heart.

I leant on the stern of the ship and watched how she stood there, in the harbour, making the sign of the cross with one hand while the other one was wiping the tears from her face with the end of her shabby little shawl, and from her dark eyes, filled with a radiance of unshatterable love for people.

In July I found myself in the semi-Tartar city, in the close quarters of a one-story house. The little house stood alone on an elevation at the end of a narrow miserable street. One of its walls faced the ruins of a building destroyed by a fire. Weeds had sprung up thickly all over the place. From amidst the growth of wormwood, nettles, horse-sorrel and clumps of elder-trees, rose the remains of a brick structure under the

wreckage of which was a large cellar where homeless dogs lived and died.

This cellar I remember well as one of my universities.

The Yevreinovs, a mother and two sons, lived on a miserable pension. I saw from the very first days with what tragic pain the grey little widow, after returning from the market and arranging her purchases on the kitchen table, would decide the difficult question how to prepare from the little pieces of poor meat a sufficient quantity of good food for three healthy lads, without taking herself into account. She was silent, noiseless, and in her grey eyes lay concealed the hopeless, meek obstinacy of a completely exhausted horse. The little horse was dragging a wagon uphill, thinking "I won't be able to pull through," but nevertheless steadily went on.

About three days after my arrival, when the children were still asleep and I was helping her in the kitchen to clean vegetables, she asked me cautiously:

"What was your purpose in coming here?"

"To study in the university."

Her eye-brows crept upwards, together with the yellow skin of her forehead. She cut her finger with the knife and sank into a chair sucking the blood, but immediately jumped up, exclaiming "The devil!" and wrapped a handkerchief around her sore finger.

"You can peel potatoes very nicely."

I should think I could! And I told her of my service on the steamship. She asked:

"Do you think that is enough to gain admission to the university?"

At that time, my sense of humour being poor, I took

her question seriously and told her in detail of the procedure which was finally to open the doors of the temple of science to me. She sighed, "ah, Nikolai, Nikolai!"

Just then he entered the kitchen to have a wash, sleepy-eyed, dishevelled but cheerful as usual.

"Mother, it would be nice to have 'pelmeni' [1] today!"

"Yes, it would be nice," she agreed.

Desirous of showing off my knowledge of the culinary art, I said that for "pelmeni" the meat was of too inferior quality and that there was not enough of it.

Here Varvara Ivanovna grew angry and shot at me a few words of such strength that the blood rushed to my ears and they suddenly lengthened. She left the kitchen, throwing a bunch of carrots on the table, and Nikolai, winking at me, explained her conduct with the words: "She is in a bad mood."

He sat down on the bench and informed me that women generally are more nervous than men. This is their natural tendency, and a certain great authority irrefutably proved it. John Stuart Mill, the Englishman, or perhaps it was some one else, also said something to the same effect.

Nikolai enjoyed teaching me very much and made use of every convenient occasion to force some indispensable knowledge into my brain; things "without which one could not live." I listened to him eagerly, and after that Foucauld, La Rochefoucauld and La Rochejacquelein fused into one in my mind, and I could not remember who chopped whose head off: Lavoisier Dumouriez's or the other way about.

[1] Russian dish made of flour and meat.

He was a noble lad and sincerely wanted "to make a man out of me"—he positively promised me that he would succeed in doing so but he lacked both the time and the other necessary conditions to concentrate his efforts seriously on me.

The egoism and frivolity of youth prevented him from seeing with what exertion and adroitness his mother managed the household. Even less did his younger brother, a heavy phlegmatic schoolboy, notice it. But I had long ago learned thoroughly the complicated tricks of the chemistry and economy of a kitchen and clearly saw the resourcefulness with which the woman was compelled to deceive daily the stomachs of her children and feed, too, for an unknown reason, a stray youth of unpleasant appearance and bad manners. Naturally every slice of bread which fell to my share was like a stone on my heart and I soon began to look for some kind of work. I left home in the morning in order to be absent for dinner and in bad weather I passed my time away in the cellar under the adjoining ruins. Inhaling the odor of the dead bodies of cats and dogs under the pattering of rain and the howling of the wind, I soon guessed that the university was a fantasy and that I should do far better if I went to Persia. And I had seen myself already as a greybearded magician inventing a method of cultivating grain the size of an apple and potatoes weighing a pood each, and had altogether thought of the many blessings I would bring to this earth on which it was so devilishly difficult for others to live and not only for me alone.

I had also learnt by that time to dream of extraordinary adventures and great deeds of heroism. This

helped me considerably during the hard days of life and since those days were many I revelled ever more in my dreams. From the outside I expected no help and did not believe in unexpected happiness, but gradually my will developed its power of resistance and the harder life grew, the stronger and even more intelligent I felt myself to be. I understood very early that resistance to his environment is what makes a man.

In order not to starve I went to the boat-landing on the Volga where it was easy to earn fifteen or twenty kopecks a day. There, among the longshoremen and tramps and sharpers, I felt like a piece of iron thrown into the midst of red-hot coals. Every day satiated me with a multitude of sharp, burning impressions. There whirled before me a hurricane of men, naked in their greed, men of coarse instincts. I liked their bitterness against life, their scoffingly hostile attitude towards the whole world and their carelessness concerning themselves. All my past life drew me towards these men, arousing a desire to immerse myself in their corroding depths. Bret Harte and an enormous number of boulevard novels helped to arouse further my sympathies for this life.

The professional thief Bashkin, a former student of the Teachers' Institute, a cruelly beaten, consumptive person, eloquently persuaded me as follows:

"Why do you shrink like a girl? Are you afraid of losing your virtue? All that a girl has is her virtue, but to you it is only a yoke. 'The bullock is virtuous, but then he only eats straw.' "

Red-haired, clean-shaven like an actor, Bashkin by the soft movements of his small body reminded

one of a kitten. He regarded himself as my instructor and protector, and I saw that he sincerely wished me success and happiness. He was very intelligent and had read many good books. The best of them all he considered the novel of Dumas "The Count of Monte Cristo," of which he said, "There is both a purpose and a heart in that book."

He liked women and spoke of them with enthusiasm, sensuously smacking his lips and with a peculiar twitch in his broken body. This twitch aroused in me a feeling of disgust, there was something sickly in it, but I listened attentively to his words, awake to their beauty.

"Woman, woman," he drawled, and the yellow skin on his face glowed with color, his dark eyes sparkled with delight.

"For a woman I would do anything. Sin does not exist for her, just as there is none for Satan! Spend your life being in love, you can invent nothing better!"

He had a gift for story-telling and easily composed touching rhymes for the street-girls about the sorrows of unhappy love. His verses were sung in all the cities on the Volga and he was the author, among other songs, of the widely known jingle:

I am homely and poor,
In shreds is my blouse,
No one will take
Such a girl for a spouse.

I was on good terms, too, with Trusov, an ignorant fellow, good-looking, foppishly dressed, and with the fine hands of a musician. He ran a little shop bearing

the sign "Watchmaker" in the Admiralty Suburb, but his business was the sale of stolen goods.

"Don't you, Peshkov, learn the tricks of thievery," he would say to me, stroking his greyish beard in a dignified manner and screwing up his sly, insolent eyes. "I see that your path lies in a different direction, you are a spiritual person."

"What do you mean—spiritual?"

"Oh, one who harbours no envy, only curiosity."

As far as I was concerned this was not true, for I was very envious; for instance my jealousy was aroused by the ability of Bashkin to tell a story in a peculiar verse-like manner, with unexpected similes and figures of speech. I recall the beginning of one of his accounts of a certain love-adventure:

"I was sitting in my hotel room in the miserable town of Sviajak, on a dull-eyed night, all alone like a screech-owl in the hollow of a tree. It was autumn, in October, and the rain was falling lazily, the wind breathing like an injured Tartar who is spinning out his chant, a melody without an end, o-o-o-uh-uh-uh. . . . And then she came, light and rosy, like a cloud at dawn, with deceitful innocence in her eyes. 'Dear,' she said with sincerity, 'I have not been unfaithful to you!' I know it is a lie, but I believe it to be the truth. In my mind I am certain of it, but my heart will not believe she was unfaithful—never!"

While narrating he swayed rhythmically, shutting his eyes, and frequently, with a gentle gesture, put his hand to his heart.

His voice was monotonous and dull, but his words were luminous, and there was something of the song of a nightingale in them.

I envied Trusov. That man could tell in a remarkably interesting way of Siberia, Khiva, Bokhara, and humorously and very viciously of the life of the prelates. Once he mysteriously said of the Tsar Alexander III: "That Tsar—he knows how to manage his affairs."

Trusov seemed to me one of those "villains" who unexpectedly for the reader, at the end of the novel, turn into magnanimous heroes.

On a suffocating night these men would sometimes cross the little stream Kazanka into the meadows of bushes where they ate and drank and talked of their affairs, but oftener of the complexity of life, of the strange entanglement of human relations, and especially a lot about women. The latter were spoken of wrathfully, mournfully, at times touchingly, and nearly always with a feeling of one peering into a darkness full of anguishing surprises. I spent a few nights with them underneath a black sky and dim stars, in the stifling heat of a hollow way overgrown with shrubs of broom-corn. In the darkness, damp from the proximity of the Volga, the lights of mast-lamps crawled like gold spiders in all directions. The black heap of the hilly bank beyond was studded with fiery flakes and veins: the illuminated windows of taverns and houses in the prosperous village of Uslon. Dull was the thud of the steamboats' paddle-wheels on the water; wolf-like the strenuous howling of the boatmen on a chain of barges; somewhere a hammer was striking iron, a song dolefully vibrated in the air —somebody's soul was quietly burning out. From the song sprang grief which covered one's heart like ashes.

And it was even sadder to listen to the silently gliding words of the men who were meditating about life, each speaking about himself, almost insensible to the others. Sitting or lying under the bushes, they would smoke cigarettes, every now and then take a drink of vodka or beer, but not too greedily, and then resume their backward wanderings on the road of reminiscence.

"Now, here is something that once happened to me," says some one, crushed to the earth by the blackness of the night.

At the end of the story the men would agree:

"It happens that way sometimes, many things happen. . . ."

"It happens, it happens, it used to happen," I hear, and it seems to me that on this night man has reached the last hour of his life—everything *has* been already, nothing *will be* any more.

This estranged me from Bashkin and Trusov but I liked them nevertheless, and according to all the logic of my past life it would have been entirely natural if I had followed them. The frustrated aspiration to rise and acquire an education also drove me toward them. In the hours of hunger, exasperation and yearning I felt capable of committing a crime, and not only "against the sacred institution of property." However, the romanticism of youth prevented me from turning off the path which I was destined to follow. In addition to the very human Bret Harte and the boulevard novels, I had already read many serious books. They aroused in me a longing for something vague and yet more significant than anything I had seen until now.

At the same time new acquaintances, new impressions arose in my life. On the deserted grounds adjoining the house of the Yevreinovs, schoolboys gathered to play skittles and one of them, Guri Pletnev, fascinated me. Swarthy of skin, blue-haired like a Japanese, his face peppered with tiny black spots as if gun-powder had been ground into it, inexhaustibly jolly, skillful at games, sharp-witted in conversation, he was imbued with the germs of every kind of talent, and like many gifted Russians, lived by the talents with which nature had endowed him without trying to strengthen and develop them. Possessing a very delicate ear and a wonderful sense for music, which he loved, he played like an artist on the dulcimer and the balalaika, without attempting to master a more difficult and noble instrument. He was poor—he dressed shabbily—but the dashing bold movements of his sinewy body, his sweeping gestures, were in harmony with his crumpled shirt, his tattered trousers, and his badly-worn gaping boots.

He was like a man who had just got on his feet after a serious and protracted illness, or like a prisoner just released from jail. Everything in life for him was new and pleasant, everything aroused roaring merriment in him. He scampered over the ground noisy like the racket of a buffoon.

When he learned what a difficult and dangerous life I led, he invited me to live with him and prepare myself to be a rural teacher.

And so there I was, living in the weird, gay hole "Marussovka," probably familiar to more than one generation of Kazan students. It was a large half-ruined house on the Ribnoriadskaia Street (Fish Mar-

ket) which looked as though it were captured from its owners by hungry students, street-girls and ghosts of men whose lives were behind them. Pletnev's quarters were under the staircase leading to the garret. His folding-cot stood there; at the end of the corridor next to the window there was a table, a chair and that was all. Three doors opened onto the passage: behind two of them lived prostitutes and behind the third a consumptive student of mathematics from the seminary; tall, thin and overgrown with bristly reddish hair, a person of almost terrifying appearance, scarcely covered with dirty rags, through the holes of which shone his bluish skin and the ribs of a skeleton filling one with horror. His only nourishment was apparently his own fingernails which he bit to blood. Day and night he drew figures and made calculations and endlessly coughed a rattling cough. The street-girls, considering him insane, were afraid of him, but out of pity they would leave bread, tea, and sugar at his door. He picked up the little packages and carried them into his room, crunching away like a tired horse. But whenever they forgot or were unable for some reason to bring him their gifts, he would open the door and bellow down the passage:

"Bread!"

In his eyes, sunk into dark holes, there glittered the pride of a maniac happy with the knowledge of his own greatness. On rare occasions he was visited by a little hunchback, a cripple with a leg out of joint, grey-haired, and with a sly smile on his yellow eunuch-like face, who wore thick glasses on a swollen nose. They would shut the door tightly and sit silently for

hours in a weird calmness. Only once, late in the night, was I awakened by the hoarse and furious cry of the mathematician:

"And I say it's a prison! Geometry is a cell, yes, a mouse-trap, yes, a prison!"

The little hunchback monster tittered squeakingly, repeating many times a peculiar word, and the mathematician suddenly roared out:

"Go to the devil! Get out of here!"

When his guest rolled out into the passage, frothing, yelping, muffling himself in his broad cloak, the mathematician, standing on the threshold of his door, gaunt and terrifying, with his fingers stuck in the dishevelled hair on his head, rattled:

"Euclid is a fool! A f-o-o-l! I will prove that God is cleverer than a Greek!"

And he slammed the door so hard that something in his room fell with a loud thud.

I soon learned that the man wanted to prove mathematically the existence of God. But he died before he was able to accomplish it.

Pletnev worked in a printing-shop as a newspaper proof-reader, making eleven kopecks a night, and whenever I failed to earn something, we lived on four pounds of bread a day, two kopecks' worth of tea and three of sugar. There was little time left for work and I had to study. I overcame sciences with the greatest difficulty; especially was I oppressed by the grammar with its monstrously narrow, stiff forms. I was altogether unable to squeeze into them the living, difficult and capriciously flexible Russian language. But it soon appeared to my satisfaction that I had

begun studying too early and had I even passed the examinations for a rural teacher, I could not have received an appointment on account of my age.

Pletnev and I slept on the same cot—I—in the night —he—during the day. Worn out by a sleepless night, his face of a still darker hue and with inflamed eyes, he would come back early in the morning. I immediately rushed to the public-house to fetch some boiling water, for of course we had no kettle, and sitting by the window we drank our tea and ate our bread. Guri told me all the news from the papers, read the amusing verses of the alcoholic journalist "Red Domino" and amazed me by his jocose attitude towards life—it seemed to me that he treated it in the same way as he did the fat-faced woman Galkina, the one who traded in ladies' second-hand clothes and also in things of less scrupulous character. He rented from her a corner under the staircase, but he had no money with which to pay for his "flat"—so he substituted for it merry jokes, played on the harmonium and sang sentimental songs. When he started humming them in his small tenor voice, his eyes shone with a mocking smile. The woman Galkina in her youth had sung in the chorus of the Opera. She had a certain knowledge of songs and often out of her impudent eyes onto her purple, puffy cheeks of a drunkard and a glutton, small tears would flow in a torrent; she shook them off the skin of her cheeks with greasy fingers and then wiped the fingers with a dirty handkerchief.

"Oh, Gurotchka," she sighed, "what an artist you are! And were you a bit handsome, I'd have arranged your fate for you! How many youths have

I not brought together with women whose hearts cry from loneliness."

One of "those youths" lived here above us. He was a student, the son of an apprentice-furrier, a middle-sized lad with a broad chest and hideously narrow hips. He resembled a triangle with a broken-off sharp edge turned downwards. His ankles were as small as a woman's. Also his head, deeply set into his shoulders and arrayed with a heap of red hair, was too small for his height; on his white, bloodless face two bulging greenish eyes sullenly stared at one.

With tremendous efforts, against the will of his father, starving like a homeless dog, he managed to finish school and enter the university, but suddenly he discovered himself to be the owner of a deep soft bass voice and decided to learn to sing. Galkina took advantage of that and "arranged" him with the rich wife of a merchant, a woman about forty, whose son was a student about to finish his studies and whose daughter was also finishing school. The merchant's wife was thin and flat and straight as a soldier; she had the dry face of an ascetic nun and big grey eyes, hidden in dark cavities; she was always dressed in black; on her head she wore an old-fashioned cap and poisonously green stones trembled in her ears.

Sometimes in the evening or early in the morning she would come to see her student and Pletnev and I often used to observe how the woman as though jumping through the portal, crossed the yard with a firm and steady gait. Her face seemed terrible to us, her lips were tightly pressed together so that they were hardly perceptible; her eyes were wide-opened and as she walked along, her glance became desperate and

doomed; it seemed as if she were blind. One could not say she was hideous, but one felt in her a tension which disfigured her—stretching out her body and crumpling together her face. "Watch her," said Pletnev, "she looks like a maniac."

The student hated the merchant's wife and he hid from her, but she persecuted him like a merciless creditor or a spy.

"I am a lost man," he would own up, after having had some drink. "And why do I want to sing? With such a face and figure who will let me go on the stage?"

"Stop all this nonsense," Pletnev advised him.

"Yes, of course. . . . But then, I am sorry for her. I can't stand her, but I am sorry. If you only knew how she . . . oh!" We did know for we heard how that woman standing on the stairs in the night was beseeching in a trembling, dull voice.

"For God's sake . . . my darling, for God's sake! . . ." She was the owner of a large factory, had many houses and horses and gave thousands for the benefit of obstetric courses and, like a beggar, prayed for a caress.

After tea Pletnev went to bed and I departed searching for work and came home late at night, when Guri was expected at the printer's office. If I succeeded in bringing home some bread, sausage or boiled fish we shared the lot together and he carried his half away with him.

Remaining alone, I walked about the passages and corners of "Marussovka" watching how lived all these people who were new to me. The house was thickly crowded with them and resembled an ant heap. It

was impregnated with sour, corrosive smells and in all corners were concealed heavy shadows, hostile to people. From morning till late at night the house droned, the sewing machines of the seamstresses rattled without interruption, the operetta singers tried their songs, the student practised his scales with his bass voice, a drunken, half-mad actor loudly repeated his part, prostitutes shouted hysterically and tipsily, and the natural but insoluble question rose in my mind:

"What is all that for?"

Among the hungry young people a red-haired, bald man with high cheek bones and a great belly on thin legs was often to be seen, aimlessly wandering about. He had a huge mouth and the teeth of a horse—which gave him the nickname of "Red Horse." He was continually at law with some of his relatives who were Simbirsk merchants and announced to everybody: "I don't care if I die!—but I'll ruin them to the core! They will go beggaring in the world for three years, —after that I will give them everything back and ask them: well, how did you like it, you devils? Yes, yes!!!"

"Is this the aim of your life, Horse?"

"Yes, all my soul has strained itself in the effort to accomplish this and I cannot do anything else!"

He stuck the whole day in the different courts of justice, at his lawyers', often brought back in the evenings innumerable packages and bottles and organised loud festivals in his dirty room with the shattered ceiling and uneven floor, inviting students and seamstresses, every one in fact who wanted to eat and drink well. "Red Horse" himself drank only Rhum, a beverage which left dark-red stains on the napkin,

dresses and floor. When he had had some drink, he howled: "Dear little birdies! I love you, you are such an honest folk—And I, an evil-minded scoundrel and cr-rocodile—I want to ruin my relatives and I shall ruin them, by Jove, I will!—I'll die of it, but . . ."

His eyes twinkled pitifully and his peculiar face with high cheek-bones was wet with drunken tears, he shook them off with the palm of his hand and wiped it on his knee—his trousers were always covered with grease-stains.

"How do you live?" he cried. "Hunger, cold, poor dress—is that a law? What can you learn, leading such a life? Hah, if the Tsar knew how you live. . . ."

And snatching out of his pocket a handful of notes he offered them:

"Who wants money? Take some, you fellows!"

The singers and seamstresses greedily snatched the money out of his hairy hand, but he laughed at them, saying: "That's not for you! It's for the students!"

But the students refused to take the money.

"Money may go to the devil!" angrily shouted the son of the furrier.

One day he brought a packet of ten rouble notes crumbled into a hard roll to Pletnev and said, throwing them on the table:

"There—do you want it? I don't . . ."

And lying down on our cot, he growled and sobbed so hard that we had to give him water to cool him down. When he fell asleep, Pletnev tried to smooth out the money, but that was impossible; the notes were

so tightly pressed together that one had to separate each bit by softening it in water.

In the smoky, dirty room—the windows of which stared into the stone wall of the house next door—it is crowded and stuffy, noisy and horrible. "The Horse" shouts louder and louder. I ask him:

"Why do you live here and not in an hotel?"

"My dear friend, I do it for my soul! My soul warms itself at your fire. . . ." The furrier's son confirms: "Right you are, 'Horse.' In any other place I would have gone to the dogs. . . ."

"The Horse" begs Pletnev:

"Play us something! Sing to us!"

And laying the dulcimer on his knees, Guri sings "Rise, rise, you crimson sun." His voice is soft, it penetrates the soul.

Everything grows silent in the room, all listen pensively to the sad words and the low treble of the instrument's chords.

"How well you sing, you devil!" growls the miserable consoler of the merchant's wife.

Among the weird inhabitants of the old house, Guri Pletnev, possessing the wisdom which is called gaiety, played the part of the good spirit of the fairy stories. His soul, dyed in the bright colours of youth, lightened up life with a fire-works of charming jokes, cheerful songs, sharp mockeries on the customs and habits of people, dashing speeches on the brutal lies of life. He was only twenty years old, and seemed quite a youth in appearance, but every one in the house considered him a man to whom one could turn in a hard moment and he would always give both sound advice and help. The better people liked him—the worst

were afraid of him, and even the old porter Nikiforich always greeted him with a cunning smile.

The yard of "Marussovka" was a "passage." Leading uphill it joined two streets, the Ribnoriadskaia and Staro Grebechaia, and on the latter, not far from the gate of our home was situated in a cosy corner the shop of Nikiforich. He was the head policeman of our quarter, a tall, dry old man whose breast was covered with medals. He had a clever face, a polite smile and cunning eyes. He watched attentively our rowdy colony of the people of the past and of the future and several times a day his neatly cut figure would appear in the yard; he walked without haste and peeped into the windows of the flats with the air with which a guard of the Zoological Gardens looks into the cages of the animals. In the winter they arrested in one of the flats the one-armed officer Smirnoff and the soldier Muratoff, both officers of the order of St. George and partakers in the Akhaltekin expedition of Skobeleff; also Zohnin, Orsiankin Grigorieff Kriloff and some one else for an attempt to open a secret printing office. And one night the policemen seized a sullen inhabitant, whom I had called "The erring tower." When Guri heard of it in the morning, he ruffled his black hair in agitation and said to me:

"Look here, Maximich, damn you, run as fast as you can . . ."

He explained where I had to run to and added: "Take care! There might be some spies there . . ."

I enjoyed immensely the mysterious commission and flew to the Admiralty suburb with the rapidity of a sand-martin. There, in the dark work-shop of a cop-

persmith I found a curly-headed young man with wonderfully blue eyes; he was tinning a stew-pan, but did not look like a workman.—And in a corner, at the jawvices, fussed about a little old man with a strap on his grey hair. I asked the coppersmith:

"Have you got some work?"

The old man answered angrily: "We have some, but none for you!" The young man looked up at me and bent his head down again over the stew-pan. I gently touched his foot with mine, he looked at me with his blue eyes, amazed and angry, holding the stew-pan by the handle as if preparing to fling it at me. But seeing that I was winking at him, said quickly:

"Go, go. . . ."

I winked again and went out of the room, waiting outside the door; the curly-haired one, stretching himself out, soon rejoined me and stood silently looking at me, lighting a cigarette.

"You are—Tikhon?"

"Well—yes."

"Peter is arrested."

He frowned, watching me angrily.

"What Peter?"

"The long one, who resembles a deacon."

"Well?"

"Nothing more."

"And what have I to do with your Peter, the deacon?" he asked and the shape of his question convinced me that he was no workman. I ran home, proud of having fulfilled my task.

Such was my first participation in conspirative matters. Guri Pletnev was in contact with the whole

business, but in answer to my demands to lead me into its secrets, he said:

"It is too early for you yet, my boy! You must learn a lot first."

At that time Yevreinov introduced me to a mysterious person. This introduction was complicated by precautions, which inspired me with a premonition of something important. Yevreinov took me outside the city, to the Arskoye Field, warning me on the way that this meeting demanded a great prudence on my part and that it was necessary to keep it a secret. Pointing out to me in the distance a small grey figure, moving slowly across the barren field, Yevreinov looked about cautiously, remarking in a low voice:

"There he is! Follow him, and when he stops, walk up to him and say: 'I am the newcomer.' "

The mysterious is always pleasant, but here it seemed to me funny. An arid brilliant day, a solitary little man rolling across the field like a grey speck,—that was all. I caught up with him at the gates of the cemetery, and I saw before me a young fellow with a small dry face and a severe look in his eyes which were round like a bird's. He was dressed in the grey uniform overcoat of a school-boy, but the bright buttons had been removed and black iron ones substituted for them. The marks left by the insignia could be noticed on the worn cap, and altogether there was something about him resembling a bird which had been prematurely plucked, as though he was anxious to represent a fully matured person even to himself. We sat among the graves in the shadows of thick bushes. He talked drily, in a matter-of-fact way, and I thoroughly disliked him. Severely questioning me

as to what I read, he proposed that I should join a circle which he had organized—I agreed and we parted, he walking off first, inspecting the bleak field with circumspection.

In the circle where Pletnev and three or four other youths belonged, I was the youngest and was completely unprepared to study the works of Adam Smith with Chernishevsky's commentaries. We met in the lodging of Milovsky, a student of the Teachers' Institute, who later wrote stories under the pseudonym of Ekeonski and after writing about five volumes of them, ended by committing suicide. How many of the men I came to know parted with life of their own free will!

He was taciturn, timid in his thoughts, careful in his words. He lived in the basement of a filthy house and worked as a carpenter "for the equilibrium of the body and soul." It was tedious to be with him. The reading of Smith's book did not captivate me, the fundamental theses of economics soon appeared very familiar to me, I had mastered them by direct experience, they were inscribed on my flesh and, in my opinion, it was not worth while writing a thick book full of difficult words about something which was absolutely clear to any one who had spent his vital force for the welfare and comfort of "the strange uncle." With the greatest effort I would sit through two or three hours daily in that hole, saturated with the odour of slime, watching the water-bugs creep along the filthy wall.

Once our teacher was late in coming and we, thinking he would not come at all, arranged a little feast by buying a bottle of vodka, some bread and cucum-

bers. Suddenly his grey legs flashed past the windows, and scarcely did we have time to hide the vodka under the table when he appeared among us, and we began again commenting on the wise deductions of Chernishevsky. We all sat as motionless as idols, anticipating with fear that one of us should upset the bottle with his foot. It was upset by the teacher himself and having done the deed, he looked under the table but did not utter a word. But it would have been better if he had cursed us roundly!

His silence, his rigid face and screwed-up offended eyes confused me terribly. Looking from the corner of my eyes at the faces of my comrades, crimson with shame, I felt like a criminal towards our "religious" instructor and pitied him from my heart, although the vodka had not been bought on my initiative.

One felt bored at these readings and longed to go to a Tartar settlement where kind-hearted, gentle folk led a different, wholesome life. They spoke a ludicrously distorted Russian; in the evening they were summoned to the mosques by the wailing cry of the muezzin coming from the tall minarets; it seemed to me that the whole life of the Tartars was built on different foundations, unfamiliar and unlike the cheerless existence I knew.

I felt the lure of the Volga, and the music of a life of toil and to this day that music pleasantly intoxicates my heart. I well remember the day when I first felt the heroic poetry of labor.

A large barge, loaded with goods from Persia, struck a rock below Kazan, smashing a hole in its bottom. A company of loaders hired me to help unload the barge. It was September, an easterly wind was blow-

ing, the waves were leaping angrily on the surface of the grey river; the wind, furiously tearing at their crests, sprinkled the water with cold rain-drops. The company, which numbered about fifty hands, sullenly arranged itself on the deck of the empty barge, the men muffling themselves in mats and tarpaulins. A small panting tugboat towed the barge, throwing up red sheaves of sparks into the rain.

Dusk had come. The wet, leaden sky, as it grew darker, descended on the river. The loaders grumbled and cursed the rain, the wind and life in general; they lazily crawled along the deck, trying to find shelter from the cold and the dampness. It seemed to me that these half-numbed men were incapable of work, that they would not save the perishing freight.

Towards midnight we reached the fall of the river bed and moored the empty barge alongside the one which was stranded on the rock. The chief of the company, a venomous-looking old man, marked with small-pox and having the eyes and nose of a kite, a crafty fellow who continually spouted abusive language, shouted in a loud feminine voice, tearing off a wet cap from his bald skull: "To prayer—boys!"

The men on the deck of the barge assembled in a black heap in the darkness and began to growl like bears. And the chief, finishing his prayer before the others, yelped out: "The lanterns! Hey, fellows, show me some work! Don't bluff, my boys. Let's start, with God's help."

And the sluggish, lazy, drenched men began to "show some work." They swooped down upon the deck and into the hold of the flooded barge with whoops, yells and cheers as if going into battle. All

around me sacks of rice, bales of raisins and hides and Persian lamb started flying about with the lightness of feather pillows, and thick-set figures raced along, encouraging one another by howling, whistling and using tough slang. It was difficult to believe that the same sluggish, morose men who shortly before complained sullenly of life, rain and cold, were now working with such joy, ease, and efficiency. The rain had grown thicker and colder, the wind stronger; it tore at their shirts and blew them over their heads exposing their bellies. In the damp darkness, under the meager light of six lanterns, dusky men tossed about, their feet falling with a dull sound on the decks of the barges. They worked as if they had been hungering for labor, as if they had waited long for the pleasure of throwing from hand to hand four-pood sacks and running a race with bales on their backs. They worked as if they were playing, with the gay enthusiasm of children, with that intoxicating joy of accomplishing a task which is only surpassed by the embrace of a woman.

A large bearded man in a reefer, all wet and sticky, apparently the owner of the freight, or his agent, suddenly yelled excitedly:

"Boys, I'll put up a bucket! Two buckets, my little pirates! Step lively!"

From all sides in the darkness voices barked hoarsely at the same time:

"Three buckets!"

"All right. I'll make it three. Work away! Right-o!"

And the hurricane of work grew in intensity. I too was grabbing sacks, dragging and throwing them

about, then running and grabbing again, and it seemed to me that I myself and everything about me were twisted round in a stormy dance, that these men could work with such terrible intensity and hilarity without interruption; without sparing themselves for months, years; that they could move the very city to any place they liked by taking hold of its steeples and minarets.

That night I lived through such joy as I had never before experienced, my soul was lit up with the desire to spend my whole life in such a half-mad ecstasy of activity. The waves lashed the sides of the barge, the rain whipped the decks, the wind howled on the river, and in the grey mist of the dawn half-naked, soaked men impetuously and untiringly raced about, shouted and laughed, delighting in their power, in their work. And then the wind rent the heavy masses of clouds and a rosy sunbeam scintillated on the blue and bright patch of sky, and it was hailed by a common roar from the cheerful beasts, who shook the wet hair off their good-natured snouts. One wanted to hug and kiss these two-legged animals who were so intelligent and skillful in their work and so self-denyingly lured by it.

It seemed that nothing could resist such a tension of joyously frenzied energies, that it was capable of accomplishing miracles on earth, that in one night it could cover the whole globe with beautiful palaces and cities, as the prophetic tales will have it. Glimpsing for a minute or two the labor of man, the sunbeam could not overcome the heavy density of the clouds and drowned in them, like a child in the sea, while the rain turned into a torrential shower.

"Stop!" cried a voice, but it was angrily answered:

"I'll stop you!"

And up to two o'clock in the afternoon, until the entire freight was transferred, the half-naked men worked without resting, under a pouring rain and a sharp wind, forcing me to contemplate with reverence how rich in mighty forces was man's earth.

We then boarded a steamboat and fell asleep on it like drunkards, and on arriving in Kazan poured out on the sand of the river bank in a stream of grey dirt and went to the tavern to drink the three buckets of vodka.

There the thief Bashkin came up to me, looked at me from head to foot, and asked:

"What did they do with you?"

I described our work to him with enthusiasm. He listened to my story, sighed and remarked contemptuously:

"You are a fool! Worse than that, an idiot!"

Whistling and wagging his body like a fish, he swam away among the crowded tables at which the loaders noisily caroused. In the corner somebody with a tenor voice started an obscene song:

"Ah, this affair happened in the dark of the night,
When the lady left the house for a stroll in the garden . . ."

A dozen men, clapping their hands on the tables, roared in a deafening voice the refrain.

"The watchman guards the town,
And finds a lady lying . . ."

Then came a burst of laughter and whistling and a thunder of words which, in their violent cynicism, probably have no equal on earth.

II

THE apple trees are in flower, the village is wrapped up in rosy-coloured drifts and in a bitter aroma that penetrates everywhere, suppressing the smells of tar and manure. Hundreds of trees are in bloom, arrayed as for a feast in the rosy satin of petals,—stretch out in regular lines from the huts in the direction of the field.—In moonlight nights, shaken by a gentle wind, the moth-like flowers rustle imperceptibly, and it seems as though the whole village was bathed in heavy golden-blue waves.—The nightingales sing incessantly and passionately, while in the day the starlings tease provokingly and the unseen larks pour onto the earth their tender uninterrupted chime. On holidays, the girls and the young women walk about at night in the street, and sing songs, opening their mouths like young birds and smiling a languorous, intoxicating smile. Isot also smiled like a drunken man, he grew thin, his eyes sank into dark cavities, and his face became more stern, more handsome and—more saintly. He slept the whole day, appearing on the street only towards the evening, gently thoughtful and preoccupied. Kukushkin affectionately but coarsely, made fun of him, and he smiled shyly and said:

"You shut up! What is there to be done?"

And rapturously went on:

"Ah, how sweet life is!—And with what tenderness

one can live—what words reach to your heart!—There are things—which one shan't forget until death, and at resurrection they'll be the first that one shall remember!"

"Take care that the husbands don't give you a licking," warned the Khokhol, laughing gently.

"They'd be in their right," agreed Isot.

Nearly every night, together with the nightingales, rang out in the gardens, in the fields and on the river the high and troubling voice of Migun; he sang fine songs in a wonderful way, and a lot was forgiven him on that account by the peasants. On Saturday evenings, people assembled more and more around our shop and unavoidably the old Susloff, Barinoff, the smith Krotoff and Migun would sit down and start discussing. Some went away, others appeared, and so it lasted until midnight. Sometimes the drunken men began to grow rowdy; oftener this happened than with others with the soldier Kostin, a man with one eye and two fingers missing on one hand. Lifting up his sleeves and brandishing his fists, he approached the shop with the gait of a fighting cock and shouted hoarsely:

"You, Khokhol, you son of unwholesome folks of Turkish faith! Answer, why is it you don't go to church? You heretic soul! You confounded rioter! Answer, who are you at heart?"

They tease him:

"Mishka, why have you shot your fingers off?—Got scared of the Turk?"

He rushes to fight, but is seized with laughs and shrill cries and thrown down the ravine where rolling head first down the slope, he yelps shrilly:

"Help! They've killed me."

Then he crawls out, all covered with dust and asks the Khokhol to give him a measure of vodka.

"What for?"

"For the fun you've had with me," replies Kostin. The peasants all laugh heartily.

One day—it was a holiday—the cook, after having lit the wood in the stove, went out in the yard. I was sitting in the shop—when suddenly a terrific sigh was to be heard from the kitchen, the whole shop trembled, tin boxes with caramels tumbled from the shelves, the broken window-panes began to tinkle and the whole floor drummed. I rushed into the kitchen, black clouds of smoke were crawling from the door which led into it and behind them something hissed and cracked. The Khokhol grabbed me by the shoulder:

"Stand back. . . ."

The cook was howling in the entrance:

"The idiot! . . ."

Romass thrust himself into the smoke, one heard a rumbling, then he swore and shouted out:

"Stop that noise! Some water!"

On the floor of the kitchen the logs of wood were smoking, one chip was still burning, bricks were lying about and the black mouth of the stove was empty, as though it had been swept out with a broom. Groping through the smoke for a bucket of water, I extinguished with it the fire on the floor and started throwing the logs back into the stove.

"Take care!" said the Khokhol, leading the cook by the hand and pushing her inside the room, he ordered in a stern voice:

"Lock up the shop! Take care, Maximich, it might explode again!"

And kneeling down, he began examining the round pine logs, dragging out the ones I had pushed into the stove.

"What are you doing?"

"Ah, here it is!"

He handed me a queer round log blown up from inside, drilled out and strangely blackened with smoke.

"Do you see? The devils stuffed the log with gunpowder! What idiots! As though a pound of gunpowder could do any harm!"

He put the log aside and began washing his hands, saying:

"It's a good thing that Axinia had gone out, or she'd have been hurt. . . ." The acid smoke had dispersed —it became noticeable that the glass on the shelves was broken, the window panes too, and the bricks at the aperture of the stove had been torn out. At that moment the Khokhol's calmness did not appeal to me, he behaved as though this absurd joke did not make him in the least indignant. And outside the street-boys rushed about, screaming: "There's a fire at the Khokhol's! Fire!"

Somewhere a woman howled and lamented, and Axinia cried anxiously from the shop:

"They are trying to break into the shop, Mikheilo Antonovich!"

"Now, now, gently," he was saying, wiping his wet beard with a towel. Through the open windows of the room peered hairy faces, distorted by fear and

anger, their eyes closed from the corroding smoke and some one cried agitatedly and shrilly:

"Let's drive them away from the village! They're always raising some scandal! What is it, my God?"

A small, red-haired peasant, moving his lips and making the sign of the cross, was trying to scramble inside the window—unsuccessfully: he was holding an axe in his right hand, while the left one, grabbing convulsively at the window-sill, was continually slipping off and losing its hold.

Romass, holding the log in his hand, asked him: "Where are you going to?"

"To put out the fire, my dear man."

"But it isn't burning anywhere. . . ."

The peasant, opening his mouth in awe, disappeared, while Romass went out on the door-steps and showing the log to the crowd, said:

"One of you, my boys, has stuffed this log with gunpowder and thrown it together with our wood. But there was too little gunpowder, and no harm came of it. . . ."

I stood behind the Khokhol, watching the crowd, and heard how the peasant with the axe was telling the others in a frightened tone:

"And as he brandished the log at me . . ."

The soldier Kostin, already tipsy, was shouting:

"Send 'im away, the zealot! Let's have him judged!"

But the majority were staring at Romass in silence and listening distrustfully to his words:

"In order to blow up a hut one needs a lot of gun-

powder, I should think about forty pounds of it. Well, why don't you go?"

Some one was asking:

"Where's the bailiff?"

"One must call the police!"

The crowd dispersed unwillingly without haste, as though regretfully leaving something behind. We sat down to tea. Axinia poured it out, kinder and more affectionate than usual and said, looking compassionately at Romass: "You don't complain at them, that's why they make those pranks!"

"Does it not make you furious?" I asked.

"There is not enough time to get angry at every absurdity!"

I thought: if all people went about doing their work with such calm!

And he was already telling me that he intended going soon to Kazan and asked me what books I wanted him to bring. It seemed to me sometimes, that that man had a certain mechanism instead of a soul; like clock-work, which had been wound up for life. I loved the Khokhol and respected him very much, but I experienced a great desire to see him get angry one day at me or at some one else, watch him shout and trample his feet with fury. But he was not capable or did not want to be capable of getting into a fury. When he was irritated by meanness or stupidity, he merely mockingly half-closed his grey eyes and said in short cold words something usually very simple and merciless. One day, for instance, he asked Susloff:

"Why is it, that you, an old man, always play a false game, eh?"

The yellow cheeks and forehead of the old man slowly flushed to a purple tinge; it seemed as though even his white beard had blushed to the roots of the hairs.

"There's no profit for you in it, is there? And people will lose respect for you!"

Susloff, with a bent head, agreed. "Yes, that's true—I get no profit from it. . . ."

And afterwards he said to Isot: "That's a leader of souls for you! If we could get people like him to govern us!"

. . . In short and clear words Romass suggests to me how I must act in his absence, and it seems to me that he has already forgotten the attempt to blow him up, as one forgets the sting of a fly.

Pankov comes to see us, he examines the stove and inquires moodily:

"Did you get frightened?"

"Peuh, what of?"

"It means war, does it?"

"Sit down and have some tea."

"The wife is waiting—"

"Where have you been?"

"Fishing. With Isot."

He went away and in the kitchen repeated once more thoughtfully:

"Yes, it means war. . . ."

He always speaks in short sentences with the Khokhol, as though having long ago talked over everything complicated and of any importance. I remember having heard from Romass the story of the reign of Ivan Grosni, Isot announced:

"A dull Tsar, he was."

"A butcher," added Kukushkin, while Pankov declared resolutely:

"I don't see much brains about him. Well, he killed all the princes, but then he put in their places quantities of small noblemen. And what is still worse—foreigners. There's nothing clever in that. A small landowner is worse than a rich one. A fly isn't a wolf—you can't kill it with a rifle, but it can annoy you more than a wolf can."

Kukushkin appeared with a bucket of soft clay and, smearing the bricks into the stove, kept saying: "There's no saying, they've got some head, the confounded devils. Their own louse, that they cannot exterminate, but as to a man—they're only too ready to do so! Look here, Antonovich, don't you bring too many goods at once, better do it oftener—or else they'll set the fire to you. Now that you've gone and arranged this here thing,—there's going to be trouble, I tell you!"

This "thing" was a matter very unpleasant for the rich peasants of the village, a working company of orchard-owners. The Khokhol had organised it already, with the aid of Pankov, Susloff and two or three other reasonable peasants. The majority of the men began to look upon Romass more favourably, the number of customers in our shop augmented considerably, and even "good-for-nothing" beggars like Barinoff and Migun tried in every way to assist the Khokhol in his enterprise.

I liked Migun, I enjoyed listening to his beautiful, sad songs. When he sang, he used to shut his eyes, and his face of a martyr ceased being distorted by convulsions. He lived in the dark of the night, when

there is no moon and the sky is concealed under a thick cover of clouds. Sometimes in the evenings he would whisper gently to me:

"Come on to the Volga!"

And there, setting the forbidden tackle for the sterlets, sitting astride on the stern of his boat, his crooked, brown feet hanging in the dark waters, he spoke in a low voice: "When a noble person bullies me—all right, I'll bear it, confound him, he's a great person and knows things that I don't know. But when a peasant, just like I am, goes at me—how can I accept this? What difference is there between him and me? He counts with roubles, I with kopecks—that's about all." His face contorts painfully, his eye-brow trembles, his fingers move rapidly, examining and sharpening with a file the hooks of the tackle, and his hearty voice rings out gently:

"I'm considered a thief, yes, I admit I am one! But then who isn't? They all live by plunder, all suck and gnaw at one another. Yes—yes—God doesn't love us, it's only the devil who does!"

The black river crawls in front of us, black clouds glide above it and in the darkness one fails to see the meadowed coast. The waves cautiously shuffle against the sand of the shore and sweep at my feet as though drawing me away with them in the fathomless, sailing darkness. "One must live, mustn't one?" asks Migun, sighing.

In the hill, a dog howls mournfully. As in a dream, I wonder: "Why should such as you live as you do?"

It is very still on the river, very black and weird. And there seems to be no end to that warm darkness.

"They will kill the Khokhol. And you, too, if you don't look out!" mutters Migun, then all of a sudden, he gently starts a song.

"My mother loved me, yes, she did—and she often said
My darling son, you heart of mine, live your life in peace . . ."

He closes his eyes, his voice rings out stronger and sadder and his fingers, pulling at the string of the tackle, move more slowly.

"I did not listen to the dear one,
No, I did not listen. . . ."

I am seized with a queer sensation: as though the earth, stirred by the heavy motion of the dark, liquid space, overturns in it and I slide and fall from the earth into the darkness, where the sun has sunk down for ever.

Having stopped singing as suddenly as he began, Migun silently pushes the boat into the water, and sitting down in it, noiselessly disappears in the black shadows. I follow him with a glance and think again: "Why do such people live?"

I was on very friendly terms too, with Barinoff, an absurd fellow, a lazy boaster, a gossip and a restless vagabond. He had lived in Moscow and spoke of it with disgust:

"A hell of a town. Absurd it is. Fourteen thousand and six churches in it—and the people—all swindlers—and all have the itch, just like horses, honour bright! Merchants and army men and citizens—all of them, like one man, go about and scratch

themselves. It is true there is a big gun, there, called the Tsar-Cannon—a huge instrument it is. Peter the Great he cast it himself, to shoot at the rioters; a woman, a noble one, raised a revolt against him because of her love for him. He lived with her exactly seven years, day for day, and then left her with three children. She flew into a temper—and—on with a revolt!—And, my boy, he gave them 'what for' from that cannon—in one shot down went nine thousand three hundred and eight men!—He got frightened himself about it and said to Philaret the archbishop: let us close it up, the damned thing, to escape temptation!—So they closed it up. . . ."

I tell him that this is all nonsense—and he gets angry:

"My heavens, what a nasty temper you've got. I got this story from a learned man and you . . ."

He also had been to Kiev, to see the saints, and described it like this:

"That town—is like our village. It also stands on a hill and—there is a river, only I've forgotten its name: a pool it is to compare with the Volga. The town is a tangled one to say the truth. All the streets in it are crooked and all go uphill. The people are Khokhols, not of the same blood as Mikheilo Antonovich though, but a half-Polish, half-Tartar one. They cackle instead of speaking. An uncombed and unwashed folk they are. They eat frogs—frogs there weigh about ten pounds each. They ride on oxen and plough with them too. Their oxen are wonderful ones, the smallest is about four times as big as ours are. Three hundred and twenty-two poods of weight.—They have there fifty-seven thousand monks and two

hundred seventy-three bishops. . . . You fool! How can you contradict? I've seen it all with my own eyes and you, have you been there? No.—Well, there you are. I, my dear man, like precision better than anything else." He liked ciphers—I had taught him to add them up and multiply them—but he hated division. He multiplied complicated numbers with enthusiasm, bravely made mistakes over them and, having written a long line of ciphers on the sand with a stick, watched it in amazement, opening wide his childish eyes and exclaiming: "No one can even pronounce such a thing!"

He is an ungainly person, dishevelled and torn, but his face is very nearly handsome and his blue eyes, in a curly, merry beard, smile with the smile of a child. There is a certain likeness between him and Kukushkin, and probably because of that they steadily keep apart.

Barinoff has been twice on the Caspian Sea to catch fish and raves about it:

"The sea, my boy, is not like anything else! You are like a—midge next to it. You watch it—and it is as though you weren't there!—And life is very sweet thereabouts. Every kind of people gather near it, even an archbishop got there once—and worked, too, like the others.—A cook I saw there too; she lived as a mistress to the judge—what more could she want, do you think? Well, no, she couldn't stand it and said to him: I like you very much, my judge, but all the same: good-bye. For—who has once seen the sea is drawn to it again. There is space in the sea. No throng, just like in the skies.—I too will go there one day, for ever. You see, I don't like to have people

about me.—I ought to have lived as an hermit, in the desert—but there, I don't know any decent deserts. . . ." He roamed about the village like a homeless dog, he was despised, but one listened to his stories with as much pleasure as to the songs of Migun.

He was clever at lying. Very amusing it was to listen to him.

His stories sometimes confused even such sober-minded people as Pankov. One day that mistrustful peasant told the Khokhol:

"Barinoff says that not all has been written in books about Grosny—a lot has been concealed. He says Grosny was a were-wolf and used to turn into an eagle—from that time one coins eagles on money—in his honour, that is."

I noticed—how many times? that everything unusual and phantastical, however far from the truth it might be—appeals to people much more than serious stories of actual life.

But when I spoke of this to the Khokhol, he used to say, laughing:

"People will get over that! What is wanted is that they should learn to think and they'll soon find out the truth. And those odd dreamers like Barinoff, Kukushkin, you must understand them. They are—artists, inventors—I think Christ must have been an odd dreamer like that.—And you must admit that some of the things he invented were not bad. . . ."

It surprised me that all these people spoke little and unwillingly of God—only old Susloff remarked often and with conviction "Everything—comes from God!" And always in those words there sounded something helpless to me. It was good to live among those peo-

ple and I learnt a lot from them in those nights of discussion. It seemed to me that every question put by Romass dug its roots into the flesh of life, like a powerful tree; there in its depths, those roots entangled themselves with the roots of another equally ancient tree and on every branch thoughts bloomed dazzlingly and the leaves of resounding words flourished in splendour.—I felt my own growth, due to the intoxicating honey of books; I knew I could speak with more assurance and the Khokhol often used to praise me, with a smile:

"Bravo! You get on splendidly, Maximich."

How grateful I was to him for these words!

Sometimes Pankov used to bring his wife with him. She was a small woman with a meek face and a clever look in her dark blue eyes and was dressed in "town" dress. She would sit down quietly in a corner, modestly pursing her lips together, but very soon her mouth would open wide and her eyes stare in wonder and fear.—And sometimes it happened that hearing a strong retort, she would cover her face with her hands, laughing in confusion. Pankov, at this, would wink to Romass, saying:

"She understands, by Jove!"

Some markedly prudent people used to come to see Romass: he would go with them to my attic and sit there for hours.

Axinia served them their food and drink there; they slept there too, unseen by anybody except myself and the cook, who like a dog was devoted to Romass and worshipped him. In the nights Isot and Pankov would drive those people away in their boats

to the ship passing by or to the harbour in Lobishki. I watched from the top of the hill, how on the black, or, if there was moonlight—silvery river glided the lentiform boat, above it flashed the light of a lantern, attracting the attention of the captain of the ship—I watched this and felt myself to be a participator in a great and mysterious undertaking.—Maria Derenkova used also to come sometimes from the town, but I did not find again in her eyes the look which had troubled me so before. Her eyes seemed to me now the eyes of a young girl, happy in the consciousness of her charm and glad to feel that the big bearded man was in love with her.—He spoke to her just as quietly as he did to others, also just as mockingly, but he stroked his beard oftener than usual and his eyes shone with a warmer light. Her fine voice rang out gaily, she was all dressed in blue, with a blue ribbon in her fair hair.—Her childish hands were strangely restless—as though they were searching for something to get hold of. She was continually humming something without opening her mouth, and fanning her rosy, melting face with a handkerchief. There was something in her that troubled me in a new way, angrily and inimically, and I tried to come together with her as rarely as possible.

In the middle of July—Isot disappeared. It was said that he was drowned, and in a few days the rumour was confirmed. About seven versts beyond the village, towards the pastured coast, his canoe was driven towards the shore with a fractured bottom and a broken stern. The misfortune was explained thus: Isot must have gone to sleep on the river and his boat

had been driven towards the wash of the three barges which rode at anchor, some five versts from the village.

Romass was in Kazan when this happened. In the evening Kukushkin came to the shop, dismally sat on the sacks, silently stared at his feet, then, lighting a cigarette, asked me:

"When is the Khokhol coming here?"

"I don't know."

He rubbed his bruised face very hard with his palm, gently swearing in the worst possible language and growling like a dog with a bone stuck in its throat.

"What's the matter?"

He watched me, biting his lips. His eyes were red, his jaw trembled. Seeing that he was unable to speak from emotion I waited anxiously to hear some sad news. At last, looking out on the street, he uttered with an effort, stumbling over his words:

"I've been to see the boat. Together with Migun. Isot's boat. The bottom's been broken through with an axe. See? That means Isot's been killed. Killed!—Sure of that I am. . . ."

And shaking his head, he began stringing on strong words one after another, stifling with hot, suppressed tears, then, growing silent, began crossing himself.—It was unbearable to watch how that man wanted to sob and could not. He did not know how and sat trembling, smothered by grief and anger. He then jumped up and rushed away, still shaking his head.

The next day some urchins out bathing found Isot under the broken barge, which had landed on the shore a little higher than the village. Half of its bottom lay on the stones of the coast, the other was

still in the water and under it, near the stern, hanging on the bended hollows of the rudder, was stretched face downwards the long body of Isot with an empty, fractured skull: the water had swept the brain matter away. The fisherman had been struck a blow from behind, the nape of his neck was as though hewed off with a hatchet. The stream of the river shook him about, throwing his legs to the shore and dangling his arms—it seemed as though he was straining all his strength in the attempt to scramble on to the coast.

Gruffly and morosely about twenty rich peasants stood on the shore—the poor had not yet returned from the field. The bailiff, a thievish, cowardly little old man, was bustling about, brandishing a crook, snorting and wiping his nose with the sleeve of his rose shirt. Standing with his feet spread wide apart and a protruding belly, the stumpy little shop-keeper Kusmin watched the mournful picture, glancing from Kukushkin on to me. He was frowning sternly but his colourless eyes were misty with tears and his pock-marked face seemed to me pitiful.

"My goodness, what a misfortune!" lamented the bailiff, mincing about with his crooked feet. "You, peasants, how wrong all this is!" His daughter-in-law, a plump young woman, sat on a stone and looked dully at the water, making the sign of the cross with a trembling hand; her lips moved incessantly, the lower one, thick and red, hung down like a dog's, disclosing the yellow teeth of a sheep. Like coloured snow-heaps crowds of girls and children rolled from the hill; dusty peasants strode along hastily in our direction.

The crowd growled cautiously and not loudly:

"A quarrelsome peasant he was . . ."

"How's that?"

"That is more in Kukushkin's line . . ."

"The man's been killed for no reason whatever. . . ."

"Isot was a quiet man."

"Quiet?" roared Kukushkin, rushing at them. "Then what did you kill him for, eh? You . . . skunks!"

Suddenly one heard the hysterical laugh of a woman and her wail struck the crowd like a whip—the peasants shouted, pressing on to each other, growling and swearing, and Kukushkin jumping up to the shop-keeper struck him a blow on his rough cheek with a swing of the palm.

"Here, get this, you dog!"

Brandishing his fists, he pushed out of the brawl and gaily shouted to me: "Get out, there's going to be some fighting!"

He had been struck already, and was spitting blood from his torn lip but his face shone with indescribable pleasure. . . . "Did you see how I punched Kusmin? . . ." Barinoff ran up to us, looking in terror at the crowd round the barge that had been gathered into a thick heap from which came the thin voice of the bailiff: "No, you're going to prove to me, to whom is it that I am indulgent. Prove it to me?"

"We must get away from here," grumbled Barinoff, turning to go uphill. The evening was sultry, an oppressive heat prevented one from breathing. The purple sun sank into thick, bluish clouds, its crimson reflection flashed on the green of the bushes. Somewhere afar rattled thunder.

The body of Isot moved in front of me, and on his fractured skull the hairs, straightened by the stream, stood upright. I remembered his low smothered voice, his fine words:

"Every man has a lot of the child in him. That is what one must go at.—Take the Khokhol: he seems to be made of iron, and his soul is a child's soul."

Kukushkin, walking at my side, muttered angrily:

"We'll all be done for, like he has been done for. . . . My God, how darned stupid it all is!"

The Khokhol came two days later, late at night, apparently very pleased with something, peculiarly affectionate. When I let him inside the hut, he slapped me on the shoulder:

"You sleep too little, Maximich."

"Isot has been killed."

"Wha-at?"

His cheek bones swelled up in bumps and his beard trembled like a stream, flowing onto his chest. Without taking off his cap, he stopped in the middle of the room, his eyes half-closed, shaking his head. "So. One doesn't know who did it? No, of course . . ."

He slowly came up to the window and sat down there, stretching out his feet.

"I told him so. . . . Has the police been?"

"Yesterday the policeman came."

"Well, and . . . ?" he asked, and answered to himself: "Nothing, of course!"

I told him that the policeman had stopped as usual at Kusmin's house and had ordered Kukushkin to be put under arrest for having given the shop-keeper a blow in the face. "So. Well, what can one say to

that?" I went to the kitchen to put the kettle to boil.

At tea, Romass was saying:

"One pities those people—they kill the best men they've got. One might think they were afraid of them. As they say here, 'it's no place' for them.—When I was marched off to Siberia—one of the convicts told me the following story: he used to live on plunder and had a gang of five men under him. One of them said to the others one day: look here, fellows, let's drop this thieving business,—nothing comes of it, we lead a poor life. And they strangled him for that one day, when he was sleeping after having got drunk. The one who told me the story praised him very much, he owned to have killed three men after this occasion, without any remorse whatever, but this comrade he regrets until this day, he was such a good friend, so clever and gay, such an honest soul, too.—'But there was nothing to be done—one couldn't go on living with him, he, the one righteous man among sinners. It was no good. . . .'"

The Khokhol got up and began walking up and down the room, his hands folded behind his back, holding a pipe between his teeth, all dressed in white in a long Tartar shirt reaching to the soles.—Stepping firmly with his bare feet on the ground, he spoke in low and thoughtful tones, as though conversing with himself.

"How often I've knocked against this fear of the righteous person, this desire to banish a good man from life. There are two ways of treating such people: either they are systematically hunted and exterminated in every way—or else one looks up to them

in a dog-like fashion and crawls on one's belly before them. This happens more rarely though. But never does one try and learn how to live from them, never does one attempt to imitate them.—They can't do it. —Or, perhaps, they do not want to?"

He lifted his glass of cold tea and said:

"Yes, they can, but they won't. Just think of that: people have organised this kind of life for themselves and with tremendous efforts have grown used to it —and suddenly someone appears and revolts: no, you live in the wrong way. In the wrong way?—But, confound you, we've put into this life all our best strength and all our efforts! And—down with the righteous teacher!—Don't come troubling us! Although surely, the vital truth lies with those who say: 'You live in the wrong way.' Yes, the truth is with them. And it is they who are leading life to perfection." And pointing to the shelf with books, he added:

"Those especially!—Ah! if only I could write a book!—But I can't do it—my thoughts are too heavy and ungainly."

He sat down to the table, leant on it with his elbow, and, pressing his head between his hands, said:

"What a pity it is about Isot. . . ."

And remained sitting like that a long time, in silence.

"Well, let us go to bed now. . . ."

I went up to my attic and sat down by the window. Over the fields flashed sparkles of heat-lightning, embracing half of the skies—it seemed as though the moon shivered in terror when the transparent reddish gleams transpierced the clouds.—Dogs howled and

barked in a frenzy, and were it not for this howling one might have thought oneself on a desert island.—The thunder rumbled from afar and a stream of hot, oppressive air poured in through the window.

I saw in front of me the body of Isot—lying on the shore, under the bushes of willow. His blue face was turned towards the sky, and the glassy eyes looked sternly into their own depths. The golden beard stuck out in sharp clots and concealed the mouth—which was half-opened in a kind of amazement.

I thought I could hear him say:

"Kindness, tenderness, Maximich, that's what is wanted, most of all!—I love Easter, because it is the gentlest feast of the year!" To his blue legs, washed very carefully by the Volga, the blue trousers clung, dried by the hot sun. Flies hummed over the fisherman's face and a stupefying nauseous smell emanated from his body. . . . I heard heavy steps on the stairs; Romass, bending in the doorway, came in, sat down on my cot and, gathering his beard in his hand, said:

"You know, I'm going to get married! Yes, I am!"

"It will be hard for a woman to live here." He looked at me intently, waiting for me to say something more. But I could not find anything more to say to him. The reflections of heat-lightning invaded the room, flooding it with a phantom-like glimmer.

"I am going to marry Masha Derenkova. . . ." I could not help smiling: up to that minute the idea never came into my head that one might call that girl —Masha. It seemed funny. I did not remember whether her father and brothers ever called her that.

"Why do you laugh?"

"Nothing in particular."

"You think I'm too old for her?"

"Oh, no!"

"She told me that you had been in love with her."

"Yes, I think I was."

"And now? Has it passed?"

"Yes, I think so."

He let go his beard and spoke gently:

"At your age one often thinks to be in love, but at mine—one doesn't think of it any more—one is simply seized by that feeling and one thinks of nothing else, one has no strength for anything else. . . ."

And, showing his strong white teeth, he went on: "Antony lost the battle of Actium to Octavius because, abandoning his fleet and the command of it, he sailed away on his ship, following Cleopatra, who had got frightened and had retired from the battle.—You see the things that can happen sometimes from love!"

He stood up, straightened himself out and repeated as one acting against his own will:

"So that's how it is, I'm going to get married!"

"Soon?"

"In the autumn. As soon as I've finished with the apples."

He went away, bending his head under the doorway lower than was necessary, and I went to bed, thinking that I would do better by going away from here in the autumn.—Why had he spoken of Antony? I did not like that at all.

In the first days of August, Romass came from Kazan with a cargo-boat carrying fresh goods and another one loaded with hamper. It was in the morning, on a week-day, at about eight o'clock. The

Khokhol had just had time to change his dress and wash and was sitting down to have some tea, saying gaily:

"How fine it is to sail on the river at night. . . ." And sniffled all of a sudden, asking anxiously: "Isn't there a smell of smoke about?" And at that same moment rang out Axinia's cry:

"Fire!"

We rushed to the yard—the wall of the shed was burning on the side of the orchard, we kept some petroleum there, and tar and oil. For a few seconds we stared, dumbfounded, at the yellow tongues of fire, discoloured by the glare of the sun, that were busily licking the wall and passing on to the roof.

Axinia brought a bucket of water, the Khokhol flung it on the burning wall, then threw it down and said:

"Confound it! Get out the barrels, Maximich. Axinia, you go into the shop!"

I rolled out rapidly a barrel of tar into the yard and further on to the street and was going to do the same with petroleum, but as I grabbed at the barrel I saw that it had been opened and the petroleum was pouring out to the earth.—While I searched for the stopper, the fire did not wait, its sharp wedges penetrated through the boards of the shed, the roof cracked and something hissed mockingly about. Rolling out the half-filled barrel, I noticed that along the street women and children were rushing, clamouring and shouting.—The Khokhol and Axinia were dragging the goods out of the shop, dropping them into the ravine, and in the middle of the street stood a black, grey-haired old woman who, shaking her fist, shouted shrilly:

"Ah! The d-d-devils!"

Again running back to the shed, I found it already filled with smoke in which something droned and cracked; crimson ribbons hung down in a winding like from the roof, and the wall had already become like a red-hot grate. The smoke smothered and blinded me, I hardly had the strength to roll the barrel to the door, where it got stuck and I could not push it along, for sparkles fell down on me from the roof, scalding my skin. I cried for help and the Khokhol rushed to me, grabbed me by the arm and dragged me into the yard.

"Run away! It will blow up in a moment!"

He rushed to the entrance and I followed him, running upstairs to my attic, where lay all my books. Thrusting them out of the window, I wanted to do the same with a case of caps, but the window was too narrow for it and I began pushing out the posts with a balance-weight. Then came a dull thud, something streamed on to the roof. I understood that it was the barrel of petroleum that had exploded, the roof above me flared up and cracked sinisterly, a red stream of fire flamed past the window, peering into it and it became unbearably hot. I rushed to the staircase—thick clouds of smoke mounted up to me and purple serpents crawled on the steps. Downstairs one heard a crackling, as though iron teeth were gnawing at wood. I lost my head. Blinded by the smoke and smothering from it, I stood motionless for several seconds. Inside the dormer-window, over the stairs, peered a red-bearded yellow snout, and, convulsively distorted, disappeared, while the roof was pierced by the bloody spears of flames. I remember—it seemed

to me that the hairs on my head were cracking and I could hear no other sound but that; I knew I was dying, my legs grew as heavy as lead and my eyes smarted, although I had covered them with my hands.

The wise instinct of life whispered to me the only way to salvation: I grabbed together my mattress, my pillow and a heap of bast, wrapped my head in the sheepskin coat of Romass and—jumped out of the window.

I came to my senses on the edge of the ravine. Romass was kneeling at my side and shouting:

"Well?"

I got on to my feet, watching, in a stunned way, how our hut was thawing away, all in crimson filings, while angry tongues licked the black earth round it. The windows breathed with black smoke and yellow flowers grew vacillating on the roof.

"Well, what?" cried the Khokhol. His face, bathed in sweat, covered with soot, was flooded with dirty tears, his eyes winked in terror and some bast had entangled itself in his beard. I was seized by a wave of refreshing joy, by a huge and powerful sensation—then came a burning pain in my left foot and I lay down, saying to the Khokhol:

"I've sprained my foot."

He examined my foot, and pulled at it suddenly; I was flooded with a sharp pain, and a minute later, drunk with joy, although limping a little, was carrying to our bath-house the rescued things, while Romass, a pipe between his teeth, said gaily:

"I was sure you would be burnt alive, when the barrel exploded and the petroleum flowed to the roof. The fire rose like a pillar, high up in the air, then

a large mushroom grew in the sky and the whole hut was suddenly buried in fire. Well, I thought, it's up with my Maximich!"

He was already as calm as ever, carefully putting the things together in a heap and saying to the dishevelled and slovenly Axinia: "Sit here and watch this, so as they shouldn't steal it all, and I will go to help putting it out. . . ."

In the smoke over the ravine glided white leaves of paper.

"Oh," said Romass, "how I regret the books! They were so dear to me, those books!"

Four huts were already on fire. The day was a windless one and the fire advanced without hurry—spreading to right and left, its flexible hooks catching as though unwillingly at the hedges and roofs. The red-hot crests grabbed at the straw on the houses, the crooked fingers of blood ran over the hedges as though playing on the strings of a dulcimer, in the smoky air rang out the wailing, malevolent and glaring song of the flames and the soft, tender crackling of thawing wood. Golden "rooks" fell, out of the clouds of smoke, on to the street and the yards, men and women bustled about aimlessly, all of them anxious only for their own possessions, and everywhere resounded incessantly the wailing cry:

"Wa-a-ter!"

The water was far away, at the bottom of the hill, in the Volga. Romass gathered promptly all the peasants into a heap, grabbing them by the shoulders, pushing them about, then divided them into two groups and ordered them to hew down the hedges and sheds on both sides of the region gained by fire.—He was

obeyed implacably and then began a more reasonable struggle with the steady aim of the fire to devour all the "order," the whole street.—But the people nevertheless worked in a kind of fear and so hopelessly, as though they were doing somebody else's job.

I was in indescribably joyful spirits and felt myself stronger than ever. At the end of the street I noticed a circle of rich peasants with the bailiff and Kusmin at their head, who were standing about, doing nothing, like an audience, brandishing hands and sticks and shouting. Some peasants came riding on horses from the field, elbows in the air, women met them with clamours, urchins rushed about with shrill cries.

The fire had gained the sheds of another yard and one had to hurry up, disjointing the wall of the stable, plaited out of thick branches and already adorned with the crimson ribbons of flames. The men began to saw at the stakes of the wattle, sparks and coals flowed on them and they jumped away, rubbing with their palms their burning shirts.

"Don't funk!" cried the Khokhol. This did not help. Then he grabbed some one's cap off, shoved it onto my head:

"Saw at the other side and I will go at it here!"

I sawed off one, then two stakes, the wall shook, I scrambled onto it, grabbing at its crest, while the Khokhol pulled me by the legs to the ground and the whole wattle fell down, covering me up nearly completely. The peasants dragged together all the hedge into the street.

"Are you hurt?" asked Romass. His solicitudes augmented my strength and my agility. I wanted to distinguish myself before this man who was so dear

to me, and I worked in a frenzy only to get a word of praise from him. And in the clouds of smoke the pages of our books continued flying like pigeons.

From the right side we succeeded in preventing the fire spreading, but to the left it went further and further, invading already the tenth yard. Leaving a few peasants to watch the craftiness of the crimson serpents, Romass moved the majority to the left side. Rushing past the wealthy loafers, I heard someone exclaiming maliciously:

"It's arson!"

And the shop-keeper added:

"We ought to have a look at his bath-house. . . ."

These words stuck unpleasantly in my mind.

It is known that stimulation, and a joyful one particularly, increases one's strength. . . . I was in a state of glad enthusiasm and worked self-denyingly for a long time, then finally broke down, completely exhausted. I remember sitting on the ground, leaning against something hot. Romass was pouring water on me from a bucket and the peasants surrounding us muttered respectfully:

"The child's got some strength!"

"This one's no traitor!"

I pressed my head to Romass's foot and shamelessly burst into tears while he stroked my wet hair, saying:

"Now, now, that's enough, you must have a rest!"

Kukushkin and Barinoff, both looking like smoked devils, led me to the ravine, consoling me on the way:

"It's all right, my lad! It's all up now!"

"Got scared?"

I did not have time to rest and come to my senses, when I saw about ten "Crœsuses," with the bailiff, de-

scending into the ravine, towards our bath-house. Two soldiers were leading Romass, holding him by the hands.

He was hatless, the sleeve of his wet shirt was torn off and his pipe was pressed between his teeth; his brows were knitted together and his face was terrible. The soldier Kostin, brandishing a stick, cried frantically:

"Into the fire, the heretic soul!"

"Unlock the bath-house."

"Break the lock, the key has been lost," Romass said loudly.

I jumped to my feet, seized a stick from the ground and stood at his side. The soldiers moved away and the bailiff wailed in terror:

"Look here, Christian souls, it is not allowed to break locks!"

Kusmin pointed to me, shouting:

"And him, too! Who's he?"

"Be calm, Maximich," Romass was saying. "They think that I hid the goods in the bath-house and set the fire to the shop myself. . . ."

"Both of you!"

"Break it open!"

"Christians . . ."

"We'll answer for it. . . ."

Romass whispered to me:

"Stand with your back to mine, so as they shouldn't strike from behind. . . ."

The lock was broken, several people pushed themselves promptly inside and immediately crept back, while I profited by the occasion to hand my stick to Romass and lift another one from the ground.

"There's nothing there. . . ."

"Nothing?"

"Devils, they are!"

Someone said timidly:

"Look here, peasants, stop that."—And in answer to this came the sound of fierce, drunken voices:

"Why stop it?"

"Into the fire with him!"

"The rioters!"

"Starting workmen's companies!"

"Thieves! And all their friends are thieves!"

"Shut up!" Romass shouted out loudly. "You've seen, haven't you, that I have no goods hidden in my bath-house—what more do you want? Everything is burnt down, you see what has remained? What profit can I have in setting the fire to my property?"

"It's insured."

And again about a dozen voices roared furiously:

"What are we looking at them for?"

"Enough of that! We've had enough to bear!"

My legs trembled and things grew dim in my eyes. Through a reddish fog I saw ferocious snouts with the hairy holes of the mouths staring on them, and struggled with an invincible desire to thrash these people to death. And they roared, jumping around us:

"Ah, they've got hold of sticks!"

"With sticks, eh?"

"They're sure to pull off my beard," said the Khokhol, and I felt that he was smiling. "And you'll get some licking too, Maximich; yes, you will! But keep calm, keep calm."

"Look out, the young one has a hatchet!"

It was true, I had a carpenter's hatchet staring out of the belt of my trousers, and I had entirely forgotten about it.

"They seem to be funking it," considered Romass; "however, don't you act with your hatchet, if things come to a point."

An unknown crippled little peasant yelped shrilly, jumping on one leg:

"With bricks at them from afar! Out with them!"

He actually seized a fragment of a brick and flung it at my stomach, but before I had time to reply to him Kukushkin flew at him from above like a hawk and, embracing each other, they rolled together into the ravine. Behind Kukushkin came Pankov, Barinoff, the smith, and about a dozen men more, and immediately Kusmin began speaking in a steadier tone: "You, Mikheilo Antonovich, you're a clever man; you know that fire drives a peasant mad. . . ."

"Come on, Maximich, let us go to the public-house on the shore," said Romass, and, taking the pipe out of his mouth, stuck it with a sharp movement into the pocket of his trousers. Helping himself on with a stick, he crawled out of the ravine, and when Kusmin, walking at his side, went on saying something to him, he replied, without looking at him:

"Get out, you idiot!"

On the spot where our hut used to stand a golden heap of coals was smouldering; in the middle of it stood the stove, and from its chimney, which had been spared, rose in the hot air a bluish smoke. The red-hot rods of the cot stuck out like the claws of a spider. —The carbonised wherries of the gate stood by the wood-pile like black sentries: one of them in a crim-

son hat of coals and in sparkles resembling a cock's feathers.

"Yes, the books are all burnt," said the Khokhol with a sigh. "What a pity. . . ."

Urchins drove big fire-brands like pigs into the mud of the street with sticks; they hissed and glowed, filling the air with a white thick smoke. A young boy, about five years old, white-haired and blue-eyed, sitting in a warm black pool, drummed with a stick on a bucket, intently admiring the sounds of wood striking iron. The victims of the fire were marching about gloomily, gathering the rescued objects. In the gardens behind the scene of the fire, trees stood motionless, their leaves had reddened from the heat and the number of pink apples was more perceptible.

We went down to the river, bathed in it and then sat down in silence to drink our tea in a public-house on the shore.

"All the same, the engrossers have lost their case in regards to the apples," remarked Romass. Pankov joined us, he was thoughtful and more soft than usual.

"Well, my friend?" said the Khokhol. Pankov shrugged his shoulders:

"My hut was insured."

We sat in silence, watching each other searchingly in a peculiar fashion, as though strangers to each other.

"What will you do now, Mikheilo Antonovich?"

"I'll think it over."

"You ought to get away from here."

"I'll see."

"I've got a plan," said Pankov. "Let's go outside and talk it over."

They went. In the doorway Pankov turned round and said to me:

"There's no saying you're a timid one! You can live here all right, they'll be afraid of you!"

I also went out to the shore and lay down under the bushes, watching the river. It was hot, although the sun was sinking westwards. In a wide roll—all that I had lived through in this village was spread out in front of me, as though painted in vivid colours on the tract of the river. I felt a queer sadness filling my heart. But soon fatigue overcame me, and I fell sound asleep.

"Hullo!" I heard as in a dream, feeling that I was being shaken and dragged somewhere. "Are you dead or what? Wake up!"

Beyond the river over the meadows shone a purple moon, as large as a wheel. I saw Barinoff bending over me, shaking me by the shoulder:

"Come on, the Khokhol is anxious, he is looking for you."

Walking behind me he grumbled: "You can't go to sleep like that, anywhere. Anyone passing by might stumble and throw a stone at you. And he might do it on purpose, too. People, my dear lad, are always ready to remember evil. They've got nothing else to remember, so to say."

In the bushes on the shore some one was bustling about; the branches rustled. "Have you found him?" asked the resounding voice of Migun.

"I'm bringing him," replied Barinoff. And, as we went on, he said, sighing: "He's out stealing fish. Migun, too, hasn't got an easy life. . . ."

Romass met me with angry reproach: "What are

you roaming about for? Do you want to be thrashed?"

And as we remained alone, he said softly and gloomily:

"Pankov proposes that you should remain with him. He wants to start a shop here. I don't advise you to accept. As to myself—I've sold everything that remained to him, will go to Viatka and in a short time will write to you to come and join me. Does that suit you?"

"I'll think of it. . . ."

"Right."

He lay down on the floor, tossed about a little and then remained silent. I sat by the window, looking at the Volga.

"Are you angry with the peasants?" Romass asked sleepily. "You mustn't be. They are only silly. Anger is silliness."

Those words did not console me, they could not smooth down my fury and the sharpness of the offense. I continually saw in front of me the beastly hairy mouths—vomiting an evil yelping: "With bricks at them from afar!"

At that time I did not possess the capacity of forgetting all that I did not need to remember. Yes, I perceived of course that in each of those men, taken apart, there was very little wickedness, sometimes none. They were at least good-natured beasts, it was not difficult to make any of them smile with the smile of a child, listen with a child's confidence to your stories on the search for intellect and happiness, in the great deeds of magnanimity. To the queer soul of these people everything that rouses the dream of

an easy life, submitted to laws of personal will, is always very dear.

But when those people gather in a grey heap in village meetings or in the public-house on the shore, they conceal all that is good in them and array themselves like priests in the chasubles of lies and hypocrisy—they display a dog-like sneakiness before the strong and then it is repulsive to look at them. Or else—all of a sudden they are seized by a wolf-like fierceness, bristling up and showing their teeth, they roar furiously at each other, they are ready to fight and do fight—over a trifle; in those moments they are terrible and can destroy the same church into which they went last night as meekly as sheep into a sty. They have among them some poets and story-tellers—but they are loved by nobody and live as the laughing-stocks of the village, without help and subject to general contempt. I do not know how to live with such people, I cannot live with them. And I stated all these bitter thoughts to Romass on the day of our parting. "It is a premature deduction," he remarked with reproach.

"But what am I to do if it has formed itself in my mind?"—"It isn't right. It is unfounded." He tried to convince me with a lot of fine words that I was wrong and mistaken.

"Do not be in a hurry to condemn. It is very easy to condemn—do not run away with that kind of thing. Watch everything with calm, remembering one thing: everything passes, everything changes for the better! Too slowly you find? But then so much the more lasting. Look into every corner, feel all that you come into contact with, be fearless, but—do

not be in a hurry to condemn. Good-bye, my dear friend! We'll soon meet again!"

The next meeting took place fifteen years later in Sedletz after Romass had gone through ten more years of exile in the Jakoutsk district, for the case of the "narodopravtzi."

I was seized by a leaden melancholy when he left Krasnovidovo. I roamed about like a puppy that had lost its master. We walked about with Barinoff in the villages, worked for rich peasants, thrashed corn, dug potatoes, cleaned the gardens. I lived in his bath-house.

"Lexei Maximich, you chief without an army, how is it to be, eh?" he asked me on a rainy night. "Shall we go to the sea to-morrow? By God, that would be the right thing to do! What do we want here? They don't like such folk as we are, in this place. And one day, if we don't look out, after a drunken brawl . . ."

It was not the first time that he spoke to me of this. He, too, had grown melancholy for some reason, his monkey-like hands hung weakly, and he looked gloomily around as a man lost in a wood.

The rain flapped at the window-panes of the bath-house, a stream of water ran into the corner of the room and flowed fiercely down from it to the bottom of the ravine.

The pale lightning of a recent storm flashed feebly on the sky.

Barinoff said softly:

"Shall we go, eh? To-morrow?"

And we went.

. . . . . .

It is indescribably beautiful to sail on the Volga on an autumn night, sitting on the stern of the barge, at the rudder, which is steered by a hairy monster with a huge head—he steers, trampling his thick feet on the deck and sighing heavily:

"Hallo-o-up! Ha-rr-o—!"

Beyond the stern the water ripples like silk and softly splashes, thick like resin and knowing no bounds. Over the river glide the black clouds of the autumn. All around there exists only the slow stream of darkness, it has rubbed out the shores and it seems as though the whole earth has melted in it and has become something smoky and liquid, incessantly and continually flowing down into a dumb, deserted space, where there is neither sun, nor moon, nor stars. In front of us, in the damp darkness, the steam-tug heavily flutters and pants about, struggling against the elastic force that is drawing it. Three lights—two just above the water and one very high up over them—follow it; nearer to me, under the clouds, swim like golden crucians four other ones—one of them is the light of the lantern on the stern of our barge.

I feel myself confined in a cold, oily bubble; it glides softly on a sloping plane, while I am stuck into it like a midge. It seems to me that the movement gradually slows down, and that the moment is near when it will stop quite. The ship will cease growling and flapping with the rods of its wheels on the thick waters; all the sounds will fall off, like leaves off a tree; they will be rubbed out like inscriptions in chalk and the immobility and the silence will wrap me up imperiously.

And the big man in a torn sheepskin coat and in

a shagged sheepskin hat, that is marching about near the rudder, will also stop motionless, spellbound for ever, and will not growl any more: Hul-lo-up . . .

I asked him what his name was.

"What do you want to know it for?" he replied in a smothered voice.

At sunset, as we sailed away from Kazan, I noticed that this man, clumsy as a bear, had a hairy, eyeless face. Placing himself at the steer, he poured a bottle of vodka into a wooden jug, drank it up in two gulps as though it were water and ate an apple on the top of it. And when the steam-tug pulled at the barge, this man, seizing the lever of the rudder, glanced at the red circle of the sun and, shaking his head with a jolt, said sternly: "God bless us!"

The ship is leading from the fair in Nijni to Astrakhan four barges loaded with crude iron, barrels of sugar and some other heavy cases—all this for Persia. Barinoff knocked at the cases with his foot, inhaled the smell, reflected a while and said:

"It's nothing else but rifles from the Ijev factory. . . ."

But the man at the wheel digs a fist into his belly and asks:

"What business is it of yours?"

"In my thoughts . . ."

"And do you want to get it in the face?"

We have no money to pay for our travelling-fare; we are taken on the barge "out of kindness," and although we keep watch, just like the sailors, all the people on the barge look upon us as on beggars. "And you talk about people . . ." Barinoff reproaches me. "It is all a question of who is saddled first. . . ."

The darkness is so thick that one fails to see the barges, one only perceives the spears of the masts on the background of smoky clouds, illuminated by the lights of the lanterns. The clouds smell of naphtha. The gloomy silence of the steersman exasperates me. I have been appointed by the boatsman to watch on the steerage and to help this animal. Following the movement of the lights, at the turnings, he says to me softly:

"Look out!"

I jump up and turn the lever of the rudder.

"That's right," he growls.

I sit down again on the deck. There is no way of talking to that man, he answers in questions:

"What business is it of yours?" What is he thinking about? As we passed the spot where the yellow waters of the Kama flow into the steel track of the Volga, he looked towards the north and growled:

"Skunk!"

"Who is?"

He did not answer.

Far away, somewhere in the abyss of darkness, dogs are howling and barking. That reminds one of some fragments of one's life, which the darkness has not yet crushed. It all seems unattainably far and useless.

"There are bad dogs here," says suddenly the man at the wheel.

"Where—here?"

"Everywhere. Our dog is a real beast. . . ."

"Where are you from?"

"Vologda."

And like potatoes from a rended sack, grey and heavy words poured out:

"Who's that with you—an uncle? He's a dunce, to my mind. My uncle's a clever one. A dashing fellow. Rich, too. He's got a harbour in Simbirsk —and a public house on shore."

He pronounced all this slowly and with an effort, then stared with imperceptible eyes at the mast-lantern of the ship, watching how it crawled in the net of the darkness like a golden spider.

"Give it a turn . . . you. . . . Can you read? Do you know who is it who writes the laws?"

He does not wait for an answer and continues:

"Some say one thing! That it's the Tsar. Others say: it's the Archbishop Senate. If I knew for sure who it is I'd go to him. I'd tell him: you write such laws that I shouldn't be allowed even to lift my arm at someone, leave alone strike him. A law must be like iron. Like a key. It must lock up my heart and have done with it. Then I can answer for myself. But like it is—I can't answer. No, I can't. . . ."

He muttered to himself more and more softly and incoherently, knocking his fist against the wood of the lever. Someone shouted from the ship through a speaking-trumpet and the dull voice of the man was just as useless as the barking and howling of the dogs not yet swallowed up by the greasy night. The reflection of the lights like yellow, oily stains swims near the stern of the ship on the black waters and melts away, incapable of illuminating anything. And it is as though slime were flowing above us, so clammy and thick are the dark, juicy clouds. We slide deeper and deeper into the silent depths of the darkness. The man complains gloomily: "What has it all brought me to? My heart can't breathe. . . ." An

indifference has filled my heart, an indifference and a cold melancholy—I wanted to sleep.

Cautiously, pushing with difficulty through the clouds, stealthily came the dawn without sun, sickly and grey. It coloured the water with a leaden tinge, displayed the yellow bushes on the shore, the iron, rusty pine-trees, the dark paws of their branches, the lines of huts in the villages and the silhouette of the peasant, as though cut out of stone!

Over the barge flew a sea-gull, whizzing with her crooked wings.

The steersman and I were relieved from our watch-duty, I crawled under a tarpaulin and went to sleep, but soon it seemed to me that I was awakened by the trample of feet and cries. Peering from under my tarpaulin I saw that three sailors, pressing the steersman to the wall of the deck, were shouting in varied voices:

"Leave that, Petrushka!"

"Bless you—that's nothing!"

"That's enough of it!"

He stood quietly with folded hands, clinging with his fingers to his own shoulders, pressing a bundle to the deck with his foot, watching them all in turn and persuading them:

"Let me get away from sin!"

He was bare-footed, and bare-headed, with only a shirt and trousers on him, a dark heap of unkempt hair stuck on his head and fell onto his obstinate and prominent forehead, under which shone the small blood-shot eyes of a mole. Their look was anguished and appealing.

"You'll drown!" they told him.

"I? Never. Let me go, fellows! If you don't, I'll kill him! As soon as we get to the Simbirsk harbour, I'll . . ."

"Stop that nonsense. . . ."

"Oh, you boys!"

He slowly spread out his hands, kneeled down and, touching the boards with them as though crucified, repeated:

"Let me get away from sin."

In his voice, strangely deep, there was something violently disturbing; his hands spread out like oars, trembled, their palms turned towards the people. His bearish face in a shagged beard trembled too, the mole-like unseeing eyes rolled out of their orbits like dark little balls. It seemed as though an unseen hand had seized him by the throat and was strangling him.

The peasants stood away from him in silence as he clumsily lifted himself to his feet, took the bundle and said:

"There, thank you!"

And coming up to the stern with an unexpected agility—jumped into the river.

I also rushed to the stern and saw how Petrushka, waggling his head, pushed onto it the bundle instead of a hat and swam along, against the stream, towards the sandy bank, where he was met by the bushes, bending under the gusts of wind and throwing their yellow leaves into the water.

The peasants were saying:

"He got the better of himself, all the same."

I asked:

"Has he gone mad?"

"No, why mad? He's done it to save his soul. . . ."

Petrukha had already landed on a shallow spot, was standing up to his breast in water and brandishing the bundle above his head. The sailors shouted:

"Good-by-y-y-e!"

. . . . . .

In Simbirsk, the sailors rather ungraciously asked us to leave the barge and land on shore.

"You're not suitable people for us," they said.

They brought us in boats to the harbour of Simbirsk and we dried up on shore, having thirty-seven kopecks in our pockets.

We went to the public-house to have some tea.

"What are we going to do?"

Barinoff said with assurance:

"How, what? We've got to go further along, of course."

We sailed like "hares" [1] on a passenger-ship to Samara, got some work there on a barge and in seven days safely arrived at the shores of the Caspian, where we joined a small company of fishermen on the Kalmuk fishery Kahankul-bai.

. . . . . .

Someone introduced me to Andrei Derenkov, the owner of a small grocery concealed at the end of a miserable narrow little street over a ditch filled up with refuse.

Derenkov, a man with a withered arm, a kind face framed by a fair beard and a pair of intelligent eyes, possessed the best collection of rare and prohibited

[1] Without tickets.

books in town. They were at the disposal of students of the numerous Kazan schools and various revolutionary-minded people. Derenkov's grocery was situated in a low appendage to the house of a money-changer who belonged to the sect of the "skoptzi"; the door of the grocery led into a large room, faintly lit by a window looking out on the yard; beyond that room, continuing it, was a small kitchen, behind which in a dark entrance that joined the appendage with the house was concealed a lumber-room containing the wicked library. A part of its books was copied in ink into thick copybooks—for instance, the "Historical Letters" of Lavrov, "What Must One Do?" of Chernishevsky, some articles of Pissareff, "King Hunger," "Cunning Machinery," all these manuscripts were considerably shabby and worn out.

When I came for the first time into the grocery, Derenkov, who was busy with some customers, motioned me with his head into the next room. I entered it and this is what I saw. In the dusk and kneeling down in the corner and fervently engrossed in prayer was a little old man, resembling a picture of St. Seraphim of Sarov.[1] Looking at him, I experienced something strange and contradictory—Derenkov was said to be a "narodniki."[2] In my understanding that meant a revolutionary, and a revolutionary should not believe in God—therefore the little praying old man seemed out of place in this house. Having ended his prayer, he neatly stroked the white hairs of his head and beard—observed me carefully and said:

[1] A saint whose relics were found in 1906 at the order of the Emperor Nicholas II. and in his presence.

[2] "Narodnichestvo," a social-democratic and literary movement, taking root in Pan-slavism.

"I am Andrei's father. And you? Ah, is that so? I thought you were a student in disguise."

"What does a student want to disguise himself for?" I asked.

"Yes, that's right," returned the old man. "God will recognise one in spite of all disguise!"

He went out into the kitchen, and I sat at the window, buried in my thoughts, when I heard someone exclaim: "That's what he is like!"

At the floor-post, leading into the kitchen, stood a young girl all in white; her fair hair was cut short and in her pale, plump face shone and smiled a pair of dark-blue eyes. She looked like the angels that are represented on cheap chromo-lithographs.

"Why did you start? Am I then so terrible?" she said in a thin, trembling voice and came nearer to me, slowly and prudently, holding to the wall as she went, as though instead of the firm floor she was walking on a vacillating rope stretched out in the air. This incapacity for walking made her still more like a being from another world. Her body trembled as though needles were driven into her feet, and the wall burned her round childish hands. And her fingers were strangely motionless.

I stood in silence in front of her, experiencing a strange sensation of sharp compassion and consternation. Everything was very unusual in this dark room!

The young girl sat down on a chair as cautiously as if she were afraid that it would fly away from her. She told me very simply that this was only the fifth day that she had got out of bed, where she had lain for nearly three months: her legs and hands had been paralysed.

"It is a nervous disease of some kind," she said, smiling.

I can remember wishing that her condition should have been explained in a different way: a nervous disease seemed too common for a girl like that in such a weird room, where all the objects had pressed themselves so timidly to the walls and where even the light of the hanging-lamp glowed too brightly in the corner under the ikons, throwing aimlessly the shadow of its chains of brass onto the white cloth of the great big dinner-table.

"I have heard a lot about you—that's why I wanted to see what you were like," she said to me in her childishly faint voice.

This young girl watched me with a glance I could not stand; I felt something penetrating in her dark-blue eyes. I could not speak to her, I did not know how to begin. I stood in silence, admiring the pictures of Herzen, Darwin and Garibaldi on the walls. A boy about my age, a fair youth with impudent eyes, came out of the grocery and disappeared into the kitchen, shouting in a breaking voice:

"What are you doing here, Maria?"

"That is my younger brother, Alexei," said the girl. "And I was studying obstetrics, but felt ill all of a sudden. Why don't you speak? Are you shy?"

Then came Andrei Derenkov, with his withered hand hidden in the breast-pocket of his suit; he stroked silently his sister's soft hair, ruffling it, and asked what kind of work I was looking for? A little later appeared a red-haired slim girl with greenish eyes; she looked at me severely, and, taking the white-

gowned young woman by the arm, led her away, saying:

"Enough for to-day, Maria."

The name did not suit the girl; it was too common for her.

I also went away, strangely agitated, and the next evening found me again in that room, trying to understand how people lived in it and what they had in their souls. Anyhow—they led a peculiar life.

The kind, meek old man, Stefan Ivanovich, all white and nearly transparent, used to sit in the corner and look out from there, continually moving his lips and smiling—as though he were praying:

"Please don't touch me!"

The fear of a hare lived in him, the presentiment of a misfortune; that was clear to me.

The one-handed Andrei, arrayed in a grey jacket, the front of which was so thickly smeared with oil and flour that it had become as hard as the bark of a tree, walked about the room leaning somewhat guiltily on one side and smiling like a child to whom one has just forgiven a prank. His brother Alexei, a brutal and lazy lad, helped him in the shop, while the third brother, Ivan, studied in the Teachers' Institute and lived there, coming home only on Sundays. He was a small, neatly dressed little man, and resembled an old government official. The sick sister lived somewhere in the attic and rarely came down, and when she did I used to feel uneasy. The house was run by the mistress of the money-changer, a tall woman with the face of a wooden doll and the stern eyes of a wicked "man nun." Her daughter, the red-haired

Nastja, bustled about the house, too; when she looked at men with her green eyes the nostrils of her sharp nose trembled.

But the actual masters in the flat of the Derenkovs were the students of the University; of the Spiritual Academy and Veterinarian Institute—a loud company of people who lived in a state of continual solicitude as regards the Russian peasant and incessant anxiety as to the future of Russia. Perpetually agitated by the newspaper articles and the deductions made from recently read books; by the events in the life of the town and the University, they used to assemble in the evenings from all the streets of Kazan in Derenkov's grocery to lead furious discussions and whisper softly in the corners. They brought thick books under their arms and, poking their fingers at some of the pages, shouted at each other, each of them affirming the truth he liked best.

Of course, I understood those discussions deficiently, the truths were lost to me in the amount of words, like the little stars of grease in the thin soup of the poor. Some of the students reminded me of the old sectarian Bible-readers of the Povoljie, but I realised that in front of me were people attempting to transform life, and, although their sincerity was smothered in the stormy torrent of words, it did not drown in it. The questions which they tried to solve were clear to me and I felt myself personally affected by the successful conclusion they would make. It often seemed to me that my dumb thoughts rang in their words and I treated those people with the rapture of a captive to whom one promises freedom.

They looked at me as a joiner looks at a piece of wood out of which he might make something rather uncommon.

"A virgin nature!" they would say, recommending me to each other, with just as much pride as the one displayed by street-urchins showing to each other a penny found on the pavement. For some reason I did not like to be called a "virgin nature" or a "son of the people"; I felt myself to be a step-son of life and often experienced the weight of the power that governed the development of my mind. For instance, having seen in the window of a book-shop a book carrying the unknown title of "Aphorisms and Maxims," I flared up with the desire to read it and begged a student of the Spiritual Academy to lend it to me. "What more do you want!" exclaimed ironically the future bishop, a man with a negro's head—curly, thick-lipped, with a row of glistening white teeth. "That's nonsense, my boy! You read what is given to you and don't poke your nose into matters which have nothing to do with you!" The rude tone of the man offended me greatly. Of course I bought the book, having earned some money in the harbours and borrowed some from Andrei Derenkov. That was the first serious book I had bought and I have kept it until now. Altogether I was treated with great severity. Having read the "A.B.C. of Social Sciences," it seemed to me that the part of pastoral tribes in the organisation of cultural life was exaggerated by the author and the enterprising vagabonds and hunters underrated by him. I communicated my doubts to a philologist, and he, trying to lend an imposing expression to his feminine face, spoke to me for a whole hour

of the "right to criticise." "In order to have the right to criticise—one must believe in some fundamental truths—what do you believe in?" he asked.

That man used to read even in the street. He walked on the pavement, his face concealed by a book, pushing the passers-by. At the time when he was laid up in his attic with a bad case of typhoid he tossed about in bed, crying:

"Morality must combine with harmony the elements of freedom and violence, with har-har-harm. . . ." He was a fragile man, worn out with chronic starvation, exhausted by obstinate attempts to find stable truths. He knew no other joys in life except reading and when he imagined to have reconciled the contradictions between two strong minds, his nice dark eyes would smile with childish happiness. About ten years after my life in Kazan I met him again in Kharkov; he had done five years of exile in Kem and was studying again in the university. He seemed to me to be living in an ants' heap of contradictory ideas; although dying of consumption, he attempted to reconcile Nietzsche with Marx, spat blood and whispered hoarsely, grabbing at my hands with his cold, sticky fingers:

"You can't live without a synthesis!"

He died in a tram-car on his way to the university.

Many similar martyrs to the cause of intellect have I met in my life—and their memory is sacred to me forever.

About a dozen of men like that assembled in the flat of Derenkov—among them was even a Japanese, a student of the Spiritual Academy, Panteleimon Sato. Sometimes there also came a large broad-shouldered

man with a huge square beard and a head shaved in the Tartar fashion. He looked laced up in a tight-fitting grey jacket buttoned up to the neck. Usually he sat in some corner, smoking a short pipe and watching everybody with grey, calm, penetrating eyes. His glance often stopped on my face; I felt that this earnest man was mentally weighing me up and I was afraid of him, I do not know why. His silence amazed me, everybody spoke loudly, resolutely and eloquently and of course the sharper sounded the words, the more they pleased me—for a long time I did not conceive how often sharp words conceal miserable and deceitful thoughts. Why then does this bearded Hercules not speak? He was called "Khokhol," [1] and I think no one knew his real name except Andrei. I soon learnt that he had just returned from exile in the district of Jakoutsk, where he had spent ten years. This excited my interest for him still more, but did not inspire me with enough courage to make his acquaintance, although I was not afflicted with timidity or shyness and, on the contrary, suffered with an anxious curiosity, a longing to know everything and as rapidly as possible. This prevented me all my life from studying any one particular thing thoroughly. When one spoke of the people, I felt a certain lack of confidence in myself, that I could not make myself think on that matter in the same lines as the others did. For them —the people were an incarnation of wisdom, spiritual beauty and kind-heartedness—a being very nearly god-like and consubstantial, a receptacle of all things beautiful, stately and just. I did not know such a

[1] The name which Great-Russians use when speaking of Little-Russians.

people. I had seen carpenters, loaders, brick-layers, I knew Jacob Ossip and Gregori, and here I heard of a consubstantial people, whom they placed above themselves and on whose will they made themselves dependent. To me it was they who incarnated beauty and power of thought, in them I felt to be concentrated the good and human desire of vitality, of freedom to build life according to some new canons of love for each other. It was exactly this love for each other that I had not seen among the men with whom I had lived until now—and here it rang in every word, burned in every glance.

The words of the people-worshippers fell like a refreshing rain onto my heart and I also found great help in the ingenuous literature on the dismal existence of the peasant, the martyr-peasant. I realised that only given a very strong, a very passionate love for man can one draw from it the necessary strength to enable one to find and grasp the sense of life. I ceased thinking of myself and began to treat other people with greater attention. Andrei Derenkov trustingly confided to me that the modest profit of his trade went entirely for the benefit of the men who believed that "the happiness of the people goes before everything else." He restlessly moved about among them, like a sincerely believing acolyte at the service held by a bishop, without concealing his rapture before the quick wisdom of the bookworms. Smiling happily, his dry hand hidden on his chest, while the other one pulled in all directions his small soft beard, he asked me:

"Isn't it splendid, eh?"

And when the veterinary surgeon Lavroff, the owner

of a voice strangely like the gabble of a goose, heretically opposed the "narodniki" (people-lovers), Derenkov, closing his eyes in terror, whispered:

"What a rioter!"

His relations towards the "narodniki" were similar to mine, but the way the students treated him seemed to me the same coarse and careless way with which grand gentlemen treat a lackey. But he himself did not notice it. Very often having seen off all the guests, he persuaded me to spend the night with him. We cleaned out the room and then, lying on the floor on mats spread out, spoke in a friendly whisper in a darkness slightly illuminated by the light coming from the lamp before the images. With the peaceful joy of the believer he told me:

"Hundreds, thousands of such splendid people will assemble together, occupy all the important posts in Russia and immediately transform the whole life."

He was about ten years older than we. I could see that the red-haired Nastja fascinated him; he tried not to look into her provoking eyes, spoke with her before others in the dry, commanding tones of the master, but followed her with a longing glance, and when talking with her alone pulled his beard and smiled shyly and timidly. His little sister also observed the battles of words from her corner; her childish face pouted funnily with the effort of attention, she gazed with wide-open eyes, and at the sound of particularly harsh words sighed deeply, as though sprinkled with ice-water. A red-haired medical student hovered around her like a steady cock; he spoke to her in a mysterious whisper and frowned imposingly. It was all so frightfully interesting.

But soon came the autumn, and life without regular work became impossible for me. Fascinated by all that happened around me, I worked less and less and fed on the bread of others, which always somehow sticks in one's throat. I had to look out for a job for the winter and found it in the baker's shop of Vassili Semenoff.

This period of my life I described in the stories "The Master," "Konovalov," "Twenty-six and One." It was a very hard time! But an instructive one! And it was hard not merely physically, but morally, too.

At the moment when I sank into the basement of the workshop—between me and the people whom it had become necessary for me to watch and listen to—there rose the "wall of forgetfulness." None of them came to see me in the workshop and I, working fourteen hours a day, could not get to Derenkov's on weekdays—and spent my holidays either in bed or together with my comrades at work. A part of the latter began from the very first to look upon me as on an amusing jester, while some treated me with the ingenuous love of children for a man who can tell fascinating stories. The devil alone knows what I used to tell them; anyhow it was something that should have inspired them with the hope of another, easier and more sensible life. Sometimes I succeeded in that, and seeing how the swollen faces lighted up with human sadness and their eyes flared up with offense and anger I felt my soul at peace and thought with pride that I was working "among the people" and "instructing" them.

But it oftener happened, of course, that I experi-

enced my helplessness, my lack of knowledge, my incapacity to answer the simplest questions of life and history. I then felt thrust into a dark hole, where men swarmed like blind worms in their attempts to forget actuality and found this forgetfulness in numerous bars and in the arms of street-girls. The visit of the "houses of joy" was obligatory every month on the day of the payment of the wages: the men dreamt aloud of this forthcoming pleasure a week before the happy day was to come, and, having lived through it, told long stories about the delights they had experienced. In those discussions they used to brag cynically of their sexual energy, cruelly jeering at the women and speaking of them in tones of disgust. But strangely enough—behind all this I could hear—or was it my imagination?—a certain sadness and shame. I noticed that in the "houses of consolation," where, for a rouble, one could get a woman for a whole night, my friends behaved timidly and guiltily. This seemed natural to me. Others held themselves with an exaggerated audacity and boldness which I knew to be false and affected. The relation of the sexes thrilled me weirdly and I observed it with peculiar sharpness.

I did not make use myself of the caresses of a woman and that placed me in an unpleasant position: both the women and the friends wickedly turned me to ridicule. Very soon they stopped asking me to come with them, openly announcing:

"You, my boy, don't you come with us!"

"Why not?"

"It is no fun when you are there."

I grabbed greedily at these words, perceiving in

them something of great importance to myself, but got no better explanation from them. "Don't hang on! We tell you—stay away! It is dull to go with you. . . ." And Artem added, laughing: "It is just as though we were watched by a priest or a father." The girls at first made fun of my reserve, then they began asking in an offended way:

"Do we disgust you?"

The housekeeper, Theresa Boruta, forty years old, a plump and pretty Pole, watching me with the clever eyes of a high-bred hound, announced one day: "Leave him alone, girls—he surely has a bride, haven't you? Such an athlete can only be held back by a bride, not by anything else!"

She was alcoholic and drank savagely, being unspeakably repulsive when in a state of intoxication, but in her sober moments amazed me by the thoughtful way with which she watched people and tried quietly to find some sense in their actions.

"The most astonishing people are the students of the Academy, I assure you!" she would tell my friends. "What do they not do with a girl! They make her smear the floor with soap, put her on all fours with her hands and feet leaning on plates and push her from behind, to see how far she will glide? They do this first with one, then with the other. And there you are! What do they do it for?"

"You lie . . ." said I.

"Oh, no!" exclaimed Theresa, not the least bit offended, very quietly, and in this quietness there was something crushing.

"Well, you are inventing all this!"

"How should a girl invent anything like that?

Am I then mad?" The men listened with greedy attention to our discussion and Theresa continued telling about the pranks of the guests in the passionless tone of a person who only wants to understand: what is it all for?

The listeners expressed their disgust coarsely and swore savagely at the students, and I, seeing that Theresa was rousing an hostile feeling towards the people I had learnt to love, would begin saying that students love the people and only want to do them good.

"You mean the little students from the Voskresenskaia Street, the civil ones from the University, but I am speaking of the spiritual ones from the Arskoe Pole! They, the spiritual ones, are orphans all of them, and an orphan always grows up to be a thief or a ne'er-do-well, in one word, a bad man; he has nothing to hold on to, an orphan!" The quiet tales of the "housekeeper," and the evil complaints of the girls of the students and government officials, altogether on the "clean public" roused in my friends not only a disgust and hostility, but a kind of joy that was expressed in the words:

"The educated ones are apparently no better than we are!"

It was hard and painful to me to hear this. I saw all the filth of the town flow together into the dusky, small rooms as into a ditch, boil there on a vaporous fire and, imbued with hostility and wickedness, return in a flow back to the town. I observed how touching songs on the anxieties and pains of love were formed of unsuitable words in those holes to which people were driven by instinct and by the boredom

of life. I saw how the hideous legends arose on the lives of "educated people" and where the mocking and hostile feeling towards something took root so that they failed to understand and I perceived that the "houses of consolation" were universities, from which my friends drew a knowledge of an intensely poisonous character. I watched how "the girls of joy" moved on the dirty floor, lazily dragging their feet, how repulsively they shook their flabby bodies, dancing to the appalling squall of the accordion or to the aggravatingly cracking chords of a demolished piano. I watched all this, and my thoughts were full of a vague anguish. From all these surroundings arose a boredom that poisoned the soul with a powerless desire to get away and hide somewhere. When I began telling the men in the workshop that there were people who disinterestedly sought for the ways of freedom, for the happiness of the people, I was met with an opposition:

"But why do the girls speak of them differently?"

Mercilessly, with a cynical anger, they laughed at me—and I, like an aggressive kitten, who felt himself no sillier and braver than the grown-up dogs—I got angry with them, too. I began to realise that thoughts on life are no easier than life itself and at times I felt hatred blazing in my soul towards the obstinate and patient people with whom I worked. What made me particularly indignant was their capacity of forbearance, the meek humility with which they submitted to the raving cruelties of a drunken master.

And—as though on purpose—in those hard days I happened to get acquainted with a perfectly new idea,

which agitated me greatly, although in a way it too was hostile to me.

On one of those stormy nights when it seems that the evil wailing wind has torn the grey sky to pieces and that these pieces fall on the earth, burying her under snow-drifts of icy dust, when the life of the earth seems coming to an end, and the sun extinguished, never to rise again—on such a night, during the carnival week, I was returning to the workshop from the Derenkovs'—I walked with my eyes shut, facing the wind—across the troubled effervescence of the grey chaos—and all of a sudden fell down, stumbling against a man lying on the pavement. We both swore—I in Russian, he in French: "Oh, the devil!"

This roused my curiosity. I lifted him onto his feet—he was small and light. He pushed me, crying angrily: "My hat, damn you! Give me back my hat! I am freezing!" I found his hat in the snow, shook it out and put it on his bristly head, but he tore it off again and, shaking it at me, swore in two languages, trying to drive me away: "Get out!"

And then, all of a sudden, he ran forward and sank in the effervescent gruel. Walking on, I found him again: he was standing with his arms round the wooden lamp-post of the extinguished lantern, speaking persuasively. "Lena—I am dying— Oh, Lena . . ." He was evidently drunk and had I left him on the street he might have frozen to death. I asked him where he lived?

"What street is this?" he cried with tears in his voice. "I do not know where to go."

I put my arm round his waist and led him away, trying to find out where he lived.

"On the Boulak," he murmured, trembling. "On the Boulak . . . there, where the bath-house . . . a house . . ."

He walked unsteadily, shakily, and prevented me from moving on; I could hear his teeth chatter.

"Si tu savais!" he muttered, pushing me aside.

"What are you saying?"

He stopped, lifted his hand and said distinctly with what seemed to me a certain pride:

"Si tu savais, où je te mène . . ."

And stuck his fingers into his mouth, keeping his balance with great difficulty. I knelt down, took him on my back and carried him along, while he pressed his chin to my skull and grumbled:

"Si tu savais où . . . But I am freezing. Oh, God!"

On the Boulak I found out after some trouble in which house he lived; at last we scrambled into the entrance of a small building, hidden at the end of the yard under huge snow-heaps. He groped for the door in the darkness, knocked gently and hissed: "Sh—sh . . . gently . . ."

The door was opened by a woman in a red dressing-gown, holding a lighted candle in her hand. She let us pass, standing aside, and, finding an eyeglass, began to observe me from head to foot.

I told her that the man's hands were stiff with cold and that one ought to undress and put him to bed.

"Yes?" she asked, in a young sonorous voice.

"One must put his hands into cold water. . . ."

She silently pointed with the eyeglass into the corner; there, on an easel, stood a picture representing a river and some trees. I looked at the weirdly motion-

less face of the woman in amazement, while she retired to the other end of the room, to a table on which stood a lamp under a rose shade; she sat down there and, taking up from the table the knave of hearts, began staring at it.

"Have you any alcohol?" I asked loudly. She did not answer, busy laying the cards out on the table. The man I had brought home was sitting on a chair, bending his head very low and letting his red arms hang along his body. I put him on the sofa and started undressing him, understanding nothing, living as one in a dream. The wall opposite me was all strewn with photographs; among them shone dully a gold wreath with white bows of ribbon, on the end of which was engraved in gold letters:

"To the incomparable Gilda."

"Damn you, be careful," moaned the man, as I started rubbing his hands. The woman laid out the cards with a silent, preoccupied air. Her face was sharp-featured like a bird's, it was lighted up by a pair of large motionless eyes. Suddenly she ruffled with her small girlish hands her grey hair fluffy like a wig and asked in a low, distinct voice:

"Did you see Mischa, Georges?"

Georges pushed me away, quickly sat down and said hastily:

"But he has gone to Kiev. . . ."

"Yes, to Kiev," repeated the woman, without taking her eyes off the cards, and I noticed that her voice was monotonous, inexpressive.

"He will soon be back . . ."

"Yes?"

"Oh, yes! Very soon."

"Yes? . . ." repeated the woman.

Georges, half undressed, jumped to the floor and in two strides was already on his knees at the woman's feet, saying something to her in French.

"I am quiet," she answered in Russian.

"I lost my way, do you know? There is a snow-storm, outside, an awful wind; I thought I should freeze to death. We did not drink much." Georges spoke hastily, caressing the hand that lay on her knee. He was about forty years old; his red thick-lipped face, with a black moustache, seemed frightened and anxious; he rubbed hard the grey bristle of his hairs on his round skull and became soberer every moment.

"To-morrow we go to Kiev," said the woman—half-interrogatively, half-affirmingly.

"Yes, to-morrow! And you must have some rest. Why don't you go to bed? It is very late. . . ."

"You think Mischa will not come to-day?"

"Oh, no! In such a snow-storm. . . . Come to bed. . . ." He led her away through a small door behind the bookcase, taking the lamp off the table. I sat alone for a long time, thinking of nothing, listening to his low hoarse voice. Hairy paws scraped against the window-panes. A pool of melted snow reflected timidly the flame of the candle. The room was overcrowded with furniture; it was filled with a strange warm smell that drove one's thoughts to sleep.

Georges came back, vacillating on his feet, holding the lamp in his hand, the lamp-shade rapping at the glass.

"She's in bed."

He put the lamp on the table, stopped pensively

in the middle of the room and then spoke without looking at me: "Well, what is there to say? I'd have probably been dead but for you . . . thank you. Who are you?"

He put his hand to one side, listening to the noise in the next room and trembling.

"Is that your wife?" I asked gently.

"My wife. Everything. All my life," said the man, pronouncing each word separately, not loudly and looking down on the floor. Then he again rubbed his head with his hands very hard.

"Some tea, eh?"

He went absent-mindedly to the door and then stopped, remembering that the servant had eaten too much fish and had been sent to the hospital.

I offered to put the kettle to boil. He shook his head affirmingly and, forgetting evidently that he was undressed, led me into the kitchen, dragging his bare feet on the wet floor. There, leaning with his back to the stove, he repeated: "But for you I'd have been frozen to death, thank you!" And, starting suddenly, stared at me with frightened, wide-open eyes.

"What would have happened to her then. Oh, God . . ."

Hastily, in a whisper, looking into the dark hole of the door, he said:

"You see—she is ill! Her son, a musician, has committed suicide in Moscow, and she is still waiting for him; it is two years now. . . ."

Afterwards, as we drank our tea, he told me in incoherent, unusual words that the woman was the owner of a country house and that he had been the teacher of her son and had fallen in love with her;

that she had left her husband, a German baron, and had sung in the opera; they had been very happy together, although her first husband tried in every way to ruin her life.

He told me all this as though reading an unintelligible writing, half-closing his eyes and glancing intensely at something in the semi-darkness of the dirty kitchen where the floor was rotting all round the stove. He drank such hot tea that it burnt his lips, his face wrinkled up and his round eyes winked anxiously.

"Who are you?" he asked again. "Ah, a baker, a workman. That is strange. You are unlike one. What does it mean?"

His tone was restless, he looked at me suspiciously with the air of a hunted beast.

I gave him a short description of my life.

"Is that so?" he exclaimed softly. "Yes, yes . . ."

And all of a sudden grew animated, asking:

"Do you know the tale of the 'Ugly Duckling'? Have you read it?"

His face was distorted, he spoke in a tone of anger, amazing me with the unnaturally shrill modulation of his hoarse voice.

"That tale—fascinates one! At your age I too thought I was a swan. And how I was to enter the Academy, but went instead into the University. My father—a priest—refused to have anything more to do with me, I studied in Paris—the history of the miseries of mankind, the history of progress. And I wrote, yes, I wrote! Oh, how it is all . . ." He jumped on his chair, listened for a short time and went on:

"Progress is an invention for self-consolation. Life

—is not a thing of reason, it has no sense. Without slavery—there is no progress, without the submission of the majority to the minority mankind would get no further on the path it is following. In our desire to simplify our life, our work, we complicate it by augmenting the amount of work. Factories and machines exist in order to produce more machines—that is stupid! Workmen become more and more numerous, when after all only the peasant, the bread-producer, is of any necessity. Bread is the one thing that one must seize from nature through work. The less a man wants the happier he is; the more wishes —the less freedom."

Perhaps he used other words, but these crushing thoughts I had heard for the first time and, what is more, in such a harsh, naked shape. The man, shrieking from agitation, looked in terror at the door that opened into the inner rooms—listened to the silence and whispered again in a frenzy: "Do you understand? A man needs very little: a piece of bread and a woman. . . ."

And beginning to speak of women in a mysterious whisper, using words I had never heard, verses I had never read, he suddenly reminded me of the thief Bashkin.

"Beatrice, Fiametta, Laura, Ninon." He murmured names unfamiliar to me and spoke of the love of kings and poets, recited French verses, defining the rhythm with his thin arm, naked to the elbow.

"Love and hunger govern the world."

I heard his hot whisper and remembered that these words stood above the title of the revolutionary pamphlet, "King Hunger," which lent a particu-

larly great importance to them in my thoughts. "People seek forgetfulness, consolation, not knowledge!" This idea stupefied me completely. I left the little kitchen in the early morning, the small clock on the wall showed a few minutes past six. I walked in the grey shadows across the snow-drifts, listening to the wail of the storm and, recalling the furious shrieking of the broken man, felt that his words had stopped somewhere in my throat, strangling me. I did not want to go to the workshop and meet people, so I roamed in the streets of the Tartar suburb, dragging heaps of snow behind me, until it became quite light and the dark figures of the town inhabitants glimpsed here and there among the waves of snow.

Never again did I meet the master nor did I want to meet him. But later on I often heard people speak of the senselessness of life and uselessness of labour; this idea was expressed by illiterate vagabonds, homeless tramps and highly-cultured people. I heard it from a monk-priest, a doctor of theosophy, a chemist working on explosives, a neo-vitalist, a biologist and many others. But they did not impress me so cruelly as then when I heard them for the first time. And only about two years ago, thirty years after my first conversation on that subject, I heard all of a sudden the thoughts, expressed in very nearly the same words, from an old friend of mine, a workman.

We had started a conversation "from soul to soul" and that man, a "political leader" as he called himself, sadly joking, told me with the fearless sincerity which only Russians, I think, can have:

"My dear Alexei Maximich, all this is of no use whatever, no one needs them, all these Academies,

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sciences, aeroplanes, they are superfluous. One only needs a peaceful corner—and a woman, whom I could take in my arms whenever I liked and who would respond to me honourably, in body and soul; there, that's all! You reason like 'the intelligentsia,' you are not one of us any more; for you an idea is above the people—you think in the Jewish way: the man—for the Saturday?"

"Jews do not think like that."

"The devil alone knows how they think; we are ignorant folk," he answered, throwing his cigarette into the river and watching it.

We were sitting on the quay of the Neva, on a bench of granite, it was a moonlight night in the autumn, and we both were exhausted by a day of fruitless emotions, of obstinate but unsuccessful desire to do some good, to be useful.

"You are with us, but you are not one of us, that is what I say," he continued gently, thoughtfully. The 'intelligentsia' enjoys worrying, she is used from the dark ages to join all revolt. Like Christ, who was an idealist and revolted for heavenly aims, so revolts the 'intelligentsia' for an utopia. The idealist revolts and is joined by scoundrels, ne'er-do-wells, by a rabble who act out of evil-mindedness, feeling that there is no place for them in the world. The workman rises for the sake of the revolution, he must obtain the proper distribution of the instruments and products of labour. But having finally usurped the power—do you think he will consent to govern? Not for anything in the world! They will all disperse and every one of them on his own responsibility will build himself a quiet refuge. . . . Technics, you say? But

they only serve to tighten the knot round our necks —bind us up still stronger. No, we must free ourselves from superfluous labour! The man needs rest. Factories and sciences will not give it to us. A man needs so little. Why should I pile up a whole town when I only need a small house? Where people live in heaps—then they start inventing aqueducts, canals and electricity. And what if you tried to live without all that? How much simpler it would be! No, truly speaking, we have too many unnecessary things about us—and they all come from the 'intelligentsia' —therefore I say: the 'intelligentsia' is an unwholesome lot!"

I told him that no one managed so deeply and resolutely to deprive life of its sense as we Russians do. "The nation which is the freest of all in spirit," smiled my interlocutor. "Don't you be angry with me; I reason in the right way, as millions of us reason—only they do not know how to express it. . . . Life must be organised in a simpler fashion, then it will become more merciful to people. . . ." That man never was a Tolstoyan; never displayed any tendency for anarchies—for I know well the history of his spiritual development. After my conversation with him I unwillingly began to think: what if it actually is the case that millions of Russian peasants bear the abominable pains of the revolution; only fostering in the depths of their souls the hope that it will free them from labour? A minimum of labour brings a maximum of delight, that idea is fascinating and tempting, like everything that is impracticable, like all utopia. And I recalled the verses of Henrik Ibsen:

"Am I a conservative—Oh no!
I am the same as I was all my life,
I do not like to displease figures
But I would enjoy mixing up the whole game!
I remember only one revolution,
It was cleverer than all the following ones
And could have destroyed everything,
I mean of course the Great Flood.
But even the Devil was outwitted!
You know—Noah became the dictator!
Oh, if it all could be done in a way more honourable
I would not refrain from helping you:
You busy yourself arranging the Great Flood,
Then I, with joy, will thrust a torpedo under the Ark!"

. . . . . .

The shop of Derenkov made a very poor profit, while the number of people and "combinations" that needed material support augmented the whole time.

"We must find a way out," would say Andrei, pulling thoughtfully at his beard, and sigh, smiling guiltily.

It seemed to me that this man considered himself sentenced for life to help others, and although he had reconciled himself with this punishment at times I think it weighed on him.

Often, on different occasions, I asked him:

"Why do you do all this?"

He, evidently not grasping the sense of my questions, answered the question "What for?" and spoke like a book, not convincingly at all, of the hard life of the people, of the necessity of instruction and knowledge.

"But do they want knowledge, do they seek for it?"

"As if they didn't. Oh, of course they do. You do, I guess?"

Yes, I did. But I remembered the words of the little teacher of history: "People seek forgetfulness and consolation, but not knowledge."

For such sharp ideas—it is unwholesome to meet youths of seventeen years of age—the ideas get blunt from those collisions, and the youths, too, gain little from them. I began to think that I had always noticed a fact: that people like thrilling stories only because they allow them to forget at least for an hour or so their usual, hard life. The more "imagination" in the story the greedier the interest with which it is listened to. The more beautiful "fantasy" in a book the more it is to people's taste. To put it shortly, I swam in a vaporous fog.

Derenkov decided to start a baker's shop. I remember he had made a very exact calculation that this undertaking was to bring him no less than thirty-five per cent to each turn-over of the rouble. I was to work as the assistant baker, and being "of the house" was to watch that the first baker should not steal flour, eggs, wheat, butter and also the ready goods.

And so I moved from the barge and filthy basement to a smaller and a trifle cleaner one—it was my duty to look after its condition. Instead of a company of forty people to deal with—I had only one—he had grey hair, a small pointed beard, a face that looked as if it had been smoked, a pair of dark, pensive eyes and a peculiar mouth—it was small like the

mouth of a perch, with pouting lips, folded as though he was mentally kissing himself. And a kind of mockery lay hidden in the depths of his eyes.

There was no doubt that he stole—in the first night of our combined labour he laid aside ten eggs, about three pounds of flour and a large piece of butter.

"Where does that go to?"

"This goes to a little girl," he said in a friendly tone, and, wrinkling up his nose, added: "A very nice little girl!" I tried to persuade him that thieving was a crime. But—whether I was not eloquent enough, or perhaps not convinced enough myself in what I was attempting to prove—anyhow, my speech had no success whatever.

Lying on the bin of pastry and looking out of the window at the stars, the baker murmured wonderingly:

"He is trying to teach me. Sees me for the first time, and—there you are!—teaches me already. And he is about three times as young as I am! That *is* funny. . . ."

He watched the stars and then asked: "It seems to me that I have seen you somewhere before—where did you work? At Semenoff's? That's where there was some rioting going on? So—so. Well—I must have seen you in my dreams then. . . ."

In a few days I noticed that that man could sleep any amount of time and in any posture, even standing up leaning on a spade. When falling asleep, he lifted his eyebrows and his face changed queerly, acquiring an ironically amazed expression. His favourite topics of conversation were stories of treasures and dreams. He used to say, in a convinced tone:

"I can see all through the earth: it is stuffed with treasures like a huge pie: boilers of money, trunks, cast-iron pots are buried in it. Often has it happened to me in my dream that I see a familiar place, let us say the bath-house; under one end of it is buried a trunk of silver plate. I wake up and begin to dig there in the night. One day I get as far as one arshin and a half—and what do you think I found? Coals and a dog's skull. There it is—the treasure! All of a sudden—crack—the window of the bath-house is broken into bits and a woman shouts out furiously: 'Help! Help! Thieves!' I ran away, of course, or else I'd have got what for! Funny—isn't it?"

That word—funny—I heard very often from him, but Ivan Kosmich Latonin did not laugh, only smilingly half-closed his eyes, wrinkling up his nose and swelling out his nostrils.

His dreams were not ingenious at all—they were just as absurd and dull as reality and I could not understand why he enjoyed speaking of his dreams and avoided speaking of anything happening around him?

The whole town was in great agitation. The daughter of a rich tea-merchant who had been married to some one by force committed suicide immediately after the bridal ceremony. A crowd of young people, several thousands of them, followed her coffin, students made speeches over her grave and were dispersed by the police. In a small shop next door to the baker's everybody shouted their opinion of this dramatic incident; the room behind the shop was crowded with students and the sound of excited voices and sharp words reached even to us in the basement.

"They spared the rod too much when they were bringing up that girl," says Latonin, and then informs me: "I was fishing for crucians, when all of a sudden appeared a policeman. 'Stop that!' he cried. 'How dare you!' I could not run away, so I dipped into the water and—woke up." But although reality ran by somewhere beyond the limits of his attention, he very soon became aware that something unusual was going on in the shop: the girls that worked in it, a big, pink-cheeked girl with caressing eyes, the sister of the master and her friend, were not adapted for this work—they read books more willingly. Students came and went, sat endlessly in the room behind the shop, shouting or whispering something. The master himself came in rarely, and I, the assistant, was at the same time something like the manager of the shop.

"Are you a relation of the master's?" asked Latonin. "Or perhaps he's thinking of you for his son-in-law? No? Very funny. And the students—why do they come? For the girls. . . . Y-yes. That's possible. Although I shouldn't say the girls were specially sweet to look at. . . . The students, I guess, come more to eat the rolls than to hover round the girls. . . ." Nearly every day at five or six in the morning a short-legged young woman appears on the street, opposite the shop; she is built of hemispheres of different dimensions and looks like a bag of melons. Sitting with her bare feet hanging over the ditch before the window she yawns, calling out:

"Vania!"

She has a speckled handkerchief on her head, from under which peeps out her face, her curly hair fall-

ing in little ringlets that tickle her sleepy eyes over her small low forehead and her red cheeks that look like blown-out balls. They tickle her sleepy eyes, but she lazily fans them away with small hands which have the spread-out fingers of a new-born babe.

I cannot understand what one can talk about with a girl like that.

I wake up the baker—he asks her:

"You've come?"

"As you see."

"Did you sleep?"

"Well, what do you suppose I did?"

"What did you dream of?"

"I don't remember. . . ."

The town is quiet. Only the broom of a dvornik[1] scrapes on the street and one can hear the twittering of sparrows, who have just awakened. The warm little rays of the rising sun press themselves to the window-panes. I like these pensive beginnings of a day. The baker, stretching his hairy hand out of the window, grabs at the girl's legs; she submits to this with indifference, without a smile, winking her sleepy eyes at him.

"Peshkoff, get the warm bread out, it is time."

I take the iron leaves out of the stove, the baker snatches from them about a dozen rolls and other pastry, throwing them in the girl's lap, while she, flapping the pan-cakes from one palm to another, bites at them with the yellow teeth of a sheep, burns her tongue with them and groans angrily. The baker, admiring her, says:

"Put down your skirt, you shameless creature!"

[1] A house-porter.

And when she is gone he turns to me, boastfully:

"Have you seen? Like a ewe-lamb she looks in her ringlets! I, my boy, am a very clean man. I never have anything to do with women, only with girls. She is my thirteenth. Nikiforich is her godfather."

Listening to his raptured remarks, I wonder:

"Must I live in that way, too?"

Getting the long pieces of white bread out of the stove, I put about ten or twelve of them in a row on the board and hurriedly take them to the shop of Derenkov. Then, returning, I fill a two-pood basket with rolls and run to the Academy to be in time for the students' breakfast. There I stand in the large dining-room, distributing the bread on account or for ready money. I stand and listen to their discussions on Tolstoy. One of the professors of the Academy—Gusseff—is a furious enemy of Tolstoy. Sometimes under the rolls I have some hidden notes which I must pass on to them, unseen, while they hide other books and notes in my basket in return.

Once a week I run still further—to the "Mac House," where Professor Bekhtereff holds lectures, demonstrating the patients. One day he was exhibiting to the students a patient suffering from "mania grandiosa" when a tall man in a white dress and a cap resembling a stocking appeared at the door of the auditorium. I could not help smiling, but he, stopping for a moment in front of me, looked into my eyes, and I jumped away as though he had struck at my heart with the fiery, black spear of his glance. And the whole time while Bekhtereff, pulling at his beard, talked respectfully with the patient, I softly

stroked my face with the palm of my hand, as though it had been scalded by boiling dust.

The patient spoke in a low bass voice; he demanded something, menacingly pulling his long hand with long fingers out of the sleeve of his dressing-gown. It seemed to me that his body stretched out unnaturally, grew endlessly, and that with this dark hand he would reach me without moving from his place and seize me by the throat. Threateningly and dominatingly shone the penetrating glance of his black eyes out of the dark cavities of his bony face. About twenty students observed the man in the absurd cap, some of them smiling, the majority, concentratedly and sadly—their eyes were particularly common in comparison with his burning glances. He was terrible, but there was something majestic about him.

In the fish-like silence of the students the voice of the professor rang out loudly, and every question produced the menacing retort of the dull voice. It seemed to come from the ground or from the dead white walls. The movements of his body were grave and slow like those of a bishop.

In the night I wrote some poetry about the maniac, calling him "the lord of all lords, the friend and counsellor of God," and his image lived for a long time with me, interfering with my life. Working from six in the evening till nearly midday, I slept in the afternoon and read only during working hours, having kneaded the pastry and waiting until the next should leaven, and also after I had laid the bread into the stove. Seeing that I had grasped the mysteries of the profession, the baker worked less and less; he "instructed" me, saying with kind amazement:

"You've got a knack for working—in a year or two you will become a baker. How funny! You are young, people won't listen to you, they won't respect you. . . ."

He treated disparagingly my interest for books:

"You had better sleep, instead of reading," he advised me with solicitude, but never inquired what books I read. Dreams of treasures and the round and short little girl completely absorbed him. The girl often came in the night and then he would lead her away into the entrance, where lay the sacks of flour, or else, if it was cold, he would tell me, wrinkling up his nose:

"Go out for half an hour!"

And I departed, thinking how horribly unlike his love was to that of which one reads in books. . . .

In the small room behind the shop lived the master's sister. I used to put her kettle to boil, but avoided meeting her, for I felt uneasy in her presence. Her childish eyes continued to look at me unbearably, as at our first meetings. I suspected there might be a smile in the depths of those eyes and thought that it was a mocking one.

Owing to an excessive abundance of strength, my movements were clumsy; the baker, watching how I dragged about and lifted sacks of flour weighing five poods on the average, used to say, pityingly:

"You have strength enough for three, but no dexterity! And you are long enough, but you look like a bull, all the same. . . ."

In spite of having read many books by that time and possessing a strong liking for verses—I had even tried to compose some myself—I used my "own"

words when speaking. I felt them to be heavy and harsh, but it seemed to me that they alone could express the deep entanglement of my thoughts.

And sometimes I was intentionally coarse in my expressions—out of a feeling of rebellion against something strange in me, something that aggravated me. One of my teachers—a student of mathematics—reproached me:

"Hang it all, how queerly you speak! It isn't words you use, it's balance-weights!"

Altogether, I did not care for myself, as it often happens with adolescents. I pictured myself as being ridiculous and coarse. I disliked my face—with the high cheek-bones of a Kalmik—and my voice, which did not obey me.

And the master's sister moved swiftly and lightly like a swallow gliding in the air, and it seemed to me that the lightness of her movements did not correspond to her round and soft little figure. There was something unsteady and unreal in her gestures and gait. Her voice rang out gaily, for she used to laugh very often, and, listening to her, I thought: she wants me to forget how I saw her for the first time. And I did not want to forget it, I treasured everything unusual, I wanted to know that it was possible, that it existed.

She would ask me sometimes: "What do you read?"

I answered shortly and wanted to ask her in return:

"Why do you want to know?"

One day the baker, caressing his short-legged beauty, said to me in a strangely hoarse voice: "Go out for a moment! Hang you, why don't you go to the mas-

ter's sister, instead of losing your time here! Students . . ."

I promised I would dash his head to pieces with a weight if he uttered another word on this matter and went out into the entrance, where lay the bags of flour. I could hear Latonin's voice coming from the cleft of the half-closed door:

"Why should I be angry with him? He has filled himself with some knowledge out of books and lives like a madman. . . ."

In the vestibule I could hear the swarming of rats—in the bakery the girl's moaning and groaning. I go out into the yard, where lazily and noiselessly falls a thin rain, but the air nevertheless is oppressive and imbued with the smell of burning, for there is a wood fire around. It is long past midnight. In the house opposite the baker's the windows are open, one can hear people sing in the dimly-lit rooms. I attempt to picture myself with Maria Derenkova lying in my arms—like the baker's girl in his—and feel with my whole being that this is impossible, that it even terrifies me.

> And all the night through
> He drinks and he sings,
> Also other strange things. . . .
> He is trying. . . .

Very provokingly rings in the choir the deep bass voice on the "also." Bending down and leaning with both hands on my knees, I look into the window; through the lace of the curtain I can see a square hole, whose grey walls are illuminated by the light of a small lamp under a blue shade. In front of it, with her

face to the window, sits a young girl and writes. Now she lifts up her head and arranges a tuft of hair on her temple with a red penholder. Her eyes are half-closed and she is smiling. She slowly folds up the letter, closes the envelope, passing her tongue on its edge and throwing it on the table, threatens it with her fore-finger which is smaller than my little one.

Then she takes it up again, tears it open, reads the letter through, puts it into another envelope and writes the address, bending over the table. She then brandishes it in the air like a flag. She dances around, clapping her hands, then goes to the end of the room where her bed stands and comes forward again, having taken off her blouse; her shoulders are round like puffs. She takes the lamp off the table and disappears into the corner.

When one observes how a man behaves when he is alone—he always seems to be a maniac. I walk up and down the yard, thinking in what a queer fashion this young girl lives when she is alone in her hole. And when the red-haired student came to see her and spoke to her of something in a low voice, nearly in a whisper, she shrivelled up, becoming still smaller and looked at him, smiling timidly, hiding her hands behind her back or under the table. I did not like that red-haired man. I did not like him at all.

Walking unsteadily, wrapping herself up in a shawl, the short-legged beauty comes up to me and mutters:

"You are wanted in the bakery."

And the baker, throwing the dough out of the bin, tells me how consoling, how indefatigable is his beloved—while I consider: what shall become of me in

time? And it seems to me that somewhere near by, behind the corner, a misfortune awaits me.

The affairs of the bakery advance so well that Derenkov tries to find another shop, a larger one, and decides to engage another assistant. That is well, for I have too much work to do and am completely exhausted. "In the new bakery you will be the head assistant," the baker promises me. "I will ask them to augment your wages ten roubles a month. Yes, I will."—I understand that it is convenient for him to have me as head-assistant—he does not like to work while I do it willingly, for I know that being tired is good for me, it extinguishes the anxieties of the soul and holds back the obstinate requirements of the sexual instinct. But it prevents me from reading.

"It is well that you've left off reading—let the rats get them, the books," says the baker. "But is it possible that you don't dream? I am sure you do, only you're so secretive. . . . Funny man you are! To speak of one's dreams—there is no harm in that—there's nothing to be afraid of . . ." He was very kind to me, I think he even respected me. Or perhaps was he afraid of me, as one of the protégés of the master, although that did not prevent him from stealing the goods systematically.

My grandmother died. I heard of her death seven weeks after the burial, from a letter written to me by my cousin. In this short letter, without commas—it was said that grandmother gathering alms on the porch of the church fell down and broke her leg. On the eighth day she got the "fire of Anthony" (gangrene). Later on I heard that both my brothers and my sister with her children all sat on the old woman's

neck, feeding on the alms she had gathered. They did not have enough reason to call the doctor to see her.

It said in the letter:

"We buried her in the Petropavlowsky (cemetery) we followed her there all of us the beggars too they liked her and cried. Grandfather also cried and drove us away and himself remained on the grave we watched from behind the bushes how he cried he will also die soon."

I did not cry, but I remember it was as if an icy wind had passed over my soul. In the night, sitting in the yards on logs of wood, I felt an indescribable longing to tell someone about my grandmother, how kind and clever she was, what a mother to all people. I carried about that desperate longing with me for a long time—but there was no one to confide in and so it burned out, unsaid. I recalled those days many years after, when I read the wonderfully true story of A. P. Tchekoff, about the coachman who spoke to his horse of his son's death. And I bitterly regretted that in those days of sharp misery I had neither a dog nor a horse at my side and that I did not think of sharing my grief with the rats—there were many of them in the bakery and I was on very friendly terms with them.

At that time the policeman Nikiforich started turning round me like a kite. Stately and broad-shouldered, his hair standing on his head like a silver bristle, his face framed by a square, carefully groomed beard, he smacked his lips with relish, watching me as though I had been a Christmas goose. "You like reading, I hear?" he would ask. "What kind of books, for instance? 'The Lives of Saints,' or the

Bible perhaps?" I read the Bible and the "Tchetii-Miner." [1] This surprised Nikiforich and baffled him unpleasantly.

"Y-ye-es. Reading is lawfully wholesome. And what about Count Tolstoy? Have you had the chance of reading his books?"

I had also read Tolstoy, but, as it appeared, not the works which interested my policeman. "Those are, I should say—ordinary works, like every one writes, but they say that in some of his writings he agitates against the 'popes' (popular name for priests), if only one was to get hold of their books!"

"Some of his writings" I had also read; they were published on hectograph, but I had found them dull and knew, too, that it was better not to discuss them with the police.

After a few discourses like that on the street, the old man began to invite me:

"Come into my sentry-box and have some tea!"

I knew of course what he was after—but I had a great desire to go and see him. I consulted with some clever people and it was decided that if I declined his kind invitations, it might strengthen his suspicions concerning the bakery.

So here I am, a guest of Nikiforich. One third of a small wretched lodging is occupied by a Russian stove, the second one—by a double bed behind a cotton-print curtain with numerous pillows in fustian pillow-cases—the rest of the space is occupied by a large cupboard with plateware, a table, two chairs and a bench under the window. Nikiforich, his uniform unbuttoned, sits on the bench shutting out with his

[1] A Russian Church edition of "The Lives of Saints."

body the only small window in the room; next to me sits his wife—a plump little woman with a luxurious bosom, about twenty years of age; her cheeks are pink and her eyes of a peculiar violet shade are cunning and wicked. Her bright red lips pout capriciously, her voice has angry, dry notes in it.

"I hear," says the policeman, "that my god-child Sechetea visits your shop frequently. She is a mean and depraved girl. All women are mean!"

"Every one of them?" asks his wife.

"Without exception!" resolutely affirms Nikiforich, jingling his medals as a horse does his harness. And sipping the tea out of his saucer—repeats with relish:

"They're all mean and depraved from the last street-girl and . . . up to the queens. The queen of Sheba rode thousands of versts in the desert of depravity, when she came to see King Solomon. And our Catherine too, although she was called the Great . . ."

He tells in detail the story of a stove-heater, who after one night spent with Catherine II got promoted from a Sergeant to a General. His wife, listening attentively, passed her tongue over her lips continually and kept pushing my leg under the table.

Nikiforich speaks very flowingly, with savoury words and imperceptibly passes on to another topic.

"For instance: there is here a student called Pletnev. . . ."

His wife puts in, with a sigh:

"He isn't handsome, but so nice!"

"Who is that?"

"Mr. Pletnev."

"First of all: he is no Mister, he'll be one when he has finished studying—up till then—he's just a student; we have thousands of them. Secondly: what does nice mean?"

"He is gay and young."

"Firstly: a buffoon at a fair is also gay. . . ."

"A buffoon laughs for money."

"Be quiet! Secondly: a dog has also been a puppy once upon a time. . . ."

"A buffoon is like a monkey. . . ."

"Shut up, I've told you already! Have you heard?"

"Well, yes, I've heard. . . ."

"That's right. . . . ."

And having subdued his wife he advises me: "Yes, I tell you, try and get to know Pletnev—a very interesting féllow!"

Knowing that he has seen me probably many times with Pletnev in the street, I say: "I know him."

"Oh, is that so?"

One can see that he is vexed, he moves about jerkily, his medals jingle. And I am on the alert; I knew that Pletnev was printing some leaflets on the hectograph.

The woman, pushing me under the table, slily provokes the old man, while he, swelling up like a peacock, spreads out the sumptuous tail of his speech.

The pranks of his spouse distract my attention and again I do not notice how his voice changes, becomes lower and full of meaning. "An unseen thread—do you see?" he asks and looks into my face with round eyes, as though frightened of something.

"Take the Emperor to be a spider. . . ."

"Good God, what are you saying!" exclaimed the woman.

"You be silent! You dunce—don't you see this is said for clearness, not in slander, you mare! Take the kettle away. . . ."

And drawing together his eyebrows, half-closing his eyes, he continues, impressively:

"An unseen thread, like a spider's web, issues from the heart of His Imperial Majesty, the Emperor Alexander III., etc., etc., it goes through all the Ministers, through His Most High Excellency the Governor and all the ranks down to myself and even the lowest soldier. This thread binds everything together, everything is twined round by it. This unseen strength is the one that holds together for ever and ever the kingdom of the Tsar. And the Poles, Jews and Russians are bribed by the cunning English Queen, and try to break this thread wherever they can on the pretence that they are for the 'people'!"

In a stern whisper he asks, bending to me across the table:

"Do you see? That's right. Why do I tell you all this? Your baker praises you, he says that you are altogether a good fellow and a clever one and that you live all by yourself. But students keep coming and going the whole time to your bakery and sit with the Derenkovs late by night. I should understand if it were only one! But so many of them? Eh? I don't say anything against the students: to-day he is a student—to-morrow he'll be a public prosecutor. Students are a nice folk, but they are in a hurry to play some part, and the enemies of the Tsar set them against order. Do you see? And again I'll say . . ."

But he did not have time to say what he wanted—for the door opened wide and a little red-nosed old man with a strap on his head and a bottle of vodka in his hand came in. He was already slightly tipsy.

"What about moving the chess-figures?" he asked gaily and immediately produced a whole shower of small-talk.

"My father-in-law," said Nikiforich, in a sullen, vexed tone.

A few moments later, I said good-bye and went away. The sly woman, closing the door behind me, pinched me and said:

"Look at the clouds, how red they are, just like fire!"

Only one small golden cloud was melting in the sky.

Without any desire to offend my teachers, I will say all the same that the sentry-man explained to me more perspicuously and resolutely than they the organisation of state mechanism. Somewhere sits a spider and issues an "unseen thread" that binds together and entangles the whole life. I soon learnt to feel everywhere the strong little loops of that thread.

Late at night, having shut up the shop, the master's sister called me to her room and in a business-like way informed me that she was charged to ask me what my conversation with the policeman had been like.

"Oh, dear me!" she exclaimed anxiously, on hearing my detailed account and began running like a mouse up and down the room, shaking her head. "Tell me, does the baker try to get something out of

you? His mistress is a relation of Nikiforich, isn't she? We must discharge him. . . ."

I stood leaning by the door-post, looking at her stealthily. She had pronounced too simply the word "mistress." I did not like that. Also I did not like her decision to discharge the baker.

"Be very careful," she continued, and as usual I was confused by the clinging glance of her eyes; it seemed as if she was asking me about something that I did not understand. Now she stopped in front of me, her hands folded behind her back.

"Why are you always so sullen?"

"My grandmother has died lately."

This seemed to amuse her and she asked, smiling:

"Did you love her very much?"

"Yes. Do you want anything else from me?"

"No."

I went away and composed in the night some verses, in which, I remember, there was an obstinate line:

"You are not that which you want to appear."

It was decided that the students should come as rarely as possible to the bakery. Deprived of the occasions of meeting them, I lost the possibility of asking them about things I did not understand in the books I read, and wrote down the questions that thrilled me into a large copy-book. But once, feeling tired, I went to sleep over it and the baker read my notes. Waking me up, he asked:

"What is it you write? 'Why did Garibaldi not

drive the King away?' Who is Garibaldi? And since when is it allowed to drive away kings?"

He threw the copy-book angrily on to the bin—crawled into the stove-cleft and grumbled there:

"A nice business! Wanting to drive kings away, is he? Very funny! You leave that nonsense aside! Bookworm, indeed! About five years ago in Saratov such bookworms were caught by the policemen like mice! Yes, yes! Nikiforich is interested in you without that already. You stop driving kings away. . . ."

He spoke with a kind feeling towards me and I could not answer him as I wanted to for I was forbidden to speak with him on "dangerous topics."

III

AN exciting book circulated in the town at that time —which roused a lot of dissent. I begged the veterinary surgeon Lavroff to get it for me, but he declined, saying it was hopeless. "No, my boy, don't you expect that! But I think they are going to read it aloud here in some place; perhaps I'll find it possible to take you then . . ."

And at midnight, on the day of Assumption, I march along the Arskoe Pole, watching, through the darkness, for the silhouette of Lavroff, who is walking about fifty paces in front of me. The field is desolate, but I advance, nevertheless, "with precautions," advised so by Lavroff—whistling and singing and pretending to be a slightly tipsy artisan. Black tufts of clouds lazily glide above me and among them like a golden ball rolls the moon; shadows cover the earth; pools glisten here and there like steel and silver. Behind my back angrily clamours the town.

My guide stops at the gate of a garden, behind the Spiritual Academy, and I hastily overtake him. We scramble over the hedge in silence, walk across a thickly overgrown garden, catching at the branches of the trees which let large drops of rain fall on us. Stopping next to the wall of the house, we softly knock at the shutter of a hermetically closed window—it is opened by a bearded person; behind him I can see only darkness, and do not hear a sound. "Who's there?"

"From Jakov."

"Get in."

One perceives the presence of many people in the pitch darkness, one also hears the rustle of clothes and feet, some one's gentle cough and a whisper. The flash of a match illuminates my face and I notice several dark figures lying on the floor near to the wall.

"All there?"

"Yes."

"Get down the curtains, so as one should not see the light through the clefts in the shutters."

An angry voice grumbles:

"Who is the one who chose a forsaken house for us to gather in?"

"Sh—sh—don't make a noise . . ."

The light is a small lamp in the corner of the room. The room is empty, with no furniture in it, except two packing cases, on which is laid a board and on it are perched five people like jack-daws on a hedge. The lamp also stands on a case turned over with its bottom upwards. On the floor near the wall sit three more men, and one on the window sill, a long-haired youth, very slim and fair; except him and the bearded person I know every one. The latter proclaims in a low voice that he is going to read the pamphlet "Our Dissensions," written by Georgi Plekhanoff, a "former narodovcletz." In the dark someone growls from the floor: "We know!"

The mysteriousness of the surroundings excites me pleasantly—the poetry of the secret is always the highest poetry. I feel myself like a believer at early Mass and recall the catacombs and the first Christians. The room is filled by the sound of a low bass voice, distinctly pronouncing every word.

"Rub-bish," growls someone again out of the corner.

Out there—in the darkness glistens enigmatically and dully a circle of copper, reminding one of a warrior's helmet. I realise that it is the ventilator of the stove.

Lowered voices resound in the room; they get tangled into a dark chaos of hot words and one cannot distinguish the words from the speaker. From the window sill above my head comes the mocking, loud question: "Are we going to read or not?"

This comes from the long-haired, pale youth. All remain silent—alone the bass voice of the reader is to be heard. Matches flash around, the red fires of cigarettes shine about, illuminating the pensive faces of the people, their half-closed or wide-open eyes.

The reading lasts eternally—I get tired of listening to it, although I enjoy the sharp, fascinating words which get connected lightly and simply into convincing ideas.

Suddenly and unexpectedly the voice of the reader breaks off and the room fills immediately with indignant exclamations. "The renegade!"

"It is all mere jingling of copper!"

"It is a spit into the blood shed by heroes!"

"After the executions of Generaloff and Ulianoff . . ."

And again comes from the window sill the voice of the youth:

"My dear sirs—can't you try and substitute serious substantial oppositions to swearing?"

I do not like discussions and do not know how to listen to them; it is hard for me to follow the capri-

cious leaps of an excited mind and the naked self-love of the disputers always exasperates me.

The youth, leaning over the window sill, asks me: "You are Peshkoff, the baker, aren't you? I am Fedosseff. We must get better acquainted. After all —we have nothing more to do here—this noise will last long yet—and no good will come of it. Shall we go?"

I had heard of Fedosseff as being the organiser of a very serious circle for the young and I liked his pale nervous face with its deep eyes. Walking along with me in the field, he wanted to know whether I had any friends among the workmen, what I had read and whether I had a lot of time to spare. Then he said: "I have heard about this baker business of yours —it is so strange that you fill your life with such rubbish. What do you want to do it for?"

I had felt, myself, lately that I did not need it any more and told him of this. This seemed to please him, he shook my hand heartily, smiling with a clear smile, and told me that he was going away the next day for about three weeks, but would let me know as soon as he would be back, in order that we might meet again.

The bakery was prospering, but my personal condition was growing worse and worse. My duties augmented in number as we moved into the new building. I had to work in the bakery, distribute the bread in the different houses, in the Academy and the "Institute for Noble Maidens." The maidens when taking the rolls out of my basket used to smuggle little notes inside and often would I read the most cynical words written with a childish writing on beau-

tiful sheets of paper. I felt uneasy when the gay crowd of clean, bright-eyed young girls surrounded my basket and, making the funniest grimaces, fiddled inside the heap of rolls—I watched them and tried to guess which of them had written the shameless words, perhaps not realising their licentious meaning. And remembering the filthy "houses of consolation," I thought:

"Can it be possible that the 'unseen thread' reaches from those houses to here?" One of the girls, a brunette with a high bosom and a thick plait of hair, stopped me one day in the corridor and asked in a hasty, low voice:

"I will give you ten kopecks if you take this note to its destination."

Her dark, caressing eyes were filled with tears, she watched me, biting her lips very hard and blushing up to her ears. I refused proudly to accept the ten kopecks, but took the note and handed it to the son of one of the members of the Court of Justice, a long, lanky student with a consumptive flush on his cheeks. He offered me half a rouble, slowly and pensively counted out the money in small change and when I said I did not want it, stuffed it back into the pocket of his trousers, but missed it and it all fell on the floor with a clash. Looking distractedly as the pennies rolled in different directions, he rubbed his hands so hard that the joints of his fingers cracked, and muttered, sighing heavily: "What am I to do now? Well, good-bye! I must think it all over. . . ."

I do not know what he had to think over and at what results he arrived, but I pitied the young girl heartily. Very soon she disappeared from the Insti-

tute and I met her fifteen years after, as a teacher in a school in the Crimea; she was consumptive and spoke of everything in the world with the mercilessness of a being that has been cruelly thwarted by life.

When I had finished distributing the rolls, I went to bed, and in the evenings worked in the bakery in order to be able to deliver the warm pastry to the shop before midnight—for the bakery was situated in front of the town theater and after the performance people used to flow to us and gobble up the warm puffs. Then I would go to knead the paste for French breads, and kneading about fifteen or twenty poods with one's hands is no joke! Then again I slept for two or three hours and again went on carrying the bread to its destination.

And so it went on, day after day. But I was obsessed by the idea of sowing "the good, the reasonable, the eternal." I was a sociable person and liked to share with others the fruits of my imagination, roused by all I had gone through. I needed little to build up a thrilling story out of an every-day event, basing myself on the capricious curve of the "unseen thread." I had many friends among the workmen of the factories, Krestovnikoff and Alafonsoff, and was on especially good terms with the old weaver Nikita Rubzoff, a man who worked in nearly all the weaving factories of Russia—a clever and restless soul.

"It is fifty-seven years to-day that I am walking about on this earth, my friend Alexei Maximich, you young one, you fresh little quill!" he would say in a smothered voice, smiling with his inflamed grey eyes in dark eyeglasses tied clumsily together with

a brass wire, which left green oxygenated stains behind his ears and on the bridge of his nose. The weavers called him the "German" on account of his beard that left a short moustache and a thick tuft of grey hairs under his lip. He was middle-sized and broad-shouldered and was always imbued with sorrowful gladness. "What I like is going to the circus," he was wont to say, leaning his bald bumpy skull onto his left shoulder. "Only look what they do not manage to teach to the animals, to the horses! Consoling, I find it. I watch the beasts with respect and think: well, that proves that one should be able to teach a man some reason, too! The beast is bribed by the circus-people with a bit of sugar—well, we can get it just as well in the grocery. We need sugar for the soul and that would be as a caress to us. Therefore, my boy, it is with a caress that one must act, not with a log of wood, as it is the custom with us, eh?" He himself was not kind to people, spoke to them disdainfully and mockingly, and in discussions contradicted with short exclamations and with the evident desire to hurt his opponent. I made his acquaintance in a brewery where some other men were preparing to beat him and had even struck him twice already. I interfered in that business and led him away.

"Did they hurt you?" I asked him, walking along in the darkness, under a thin autumn rain.

"What! That isn't real thrashing!" he retorted indifferently. "Look here, why do you speak to me with a kind of respect?"

Our friendship began with this. At first he ridi-

culed me cleverly and wittily, but when I told him of the part which the "unseen thread" plays in our lives, he exclaimed thoughtfully:

"You're a clever one, do you know that! Fancy thinking of such a thing!" And he began treating me with a fatherly solicitude and with greater respect. "Your thoughts, my friend Alexei Maximich, you dear owl of mine, they are right thoughts—but who is going to believe you? It is far too unprofitable. . . ."

"But you believe, don't you?"

"I'm a homeless dog, with a short tail, while the rest of the people are watch-dogs, each keeping quantities of burdock-seeds on their tails, like wives, children, harmoniums, rubber-boots. And each one loves his own kennel dearly. No, they won't believe anything. We've had something of the kind at our factory at Marosoff's. Who goes in front gets his forehead bruised, and the forehead isn't like a back, it smarts for a long time."

He spoke in a different way after having made the acquaintance of Shaposhnikoff, the carpenter, a workman from Krestovnikoff's. The consumptive Jakov, a great expert on the Bible and a skilful player on the guitar, amazed him by his fierce denial of God. Spitting to right and left the bloody threads of his decayed lungs, Jakov passionately and harshly announced:

"First of all, I have not been created in the image and likeness of God, I do not know anything, I cannot do anything and I am not a good man; no, I am not! Secondly, God either does not know how hard my life is, or knows and is powerless to help, or else

He can help—and won't! Thirdly, God is not all-knowing, all-powerful—He is not merciful, either—in one word, He is not! It is all an invention, all life is an invention, but you won't succeed in fooling me!"

Rubzoff was dumbfounded with amazement, then got grey with fury and swore wildly at him, but Jakov disarmed him with the solemn words of the Bible quotations; he remained silent and shrivelled up in thought.

Shaposhnikoff, when he spoke, became terrible to look at. His face was swarthy and lean, his hair curly and black like a gypsy's and out of his bluish lips flashed a row of teeth sharp as a wolf's. His dark motionless eyes looked fiercely at his opponent and it was hard to stand that heavy, unbending glance; he reminded me of the patient who suffered from the "mania grandiosa."

Walking away with me from Jakov's, Rubzoff said sullenly:

"Never have I heard anyone rise against God before. I've heard every kind of thing, but that—never! Of course that man will not remain long on this earth. Well—it's a pity. Did you see how red-hot with anger he got? . . ."

"Very interesting, isn't it, my friend?"

He rapidly made friends with Jakov and somehow grew agitated and restless and continually rubbed his inflamed eyes with his fingers. "So—so," he said, smiling slyly, "God, then, is to be dismissed! Hm. . . . As to the Tsar, my darling, I've got my own mind on it—the Tsar is no hindrance to me. The whole business does not lie in Tsars but in masters! I can get on with any Tsar, even with Van Grosing

himself if you like; let him sit on the throne as much as he wants, but let me have a free hand in the matter, there! If you do—I'll forge you with golden chains to your throne, and pray to you. . . ."

Having read "King Hunger," he said: "It is all quite right!"

And when he saw for the first time a pamphlet in lithograph, he asked me: "Who wrote this to you? Very distinctly he did it! You must say thank you to him!"

He possessed an insatiable hunger for knowledge and listened with intense attention to the crushing blasphemies of Shaposhnikoff as well as to my stories about books. He would laugh gladly, throwing back his head and arching his Adam's apple, and say admiringly: "What a clever thing a man's brain is, by Jove!"

He himself read little—his bad eyes prevented him from it—but he knew a lot and amazed me in this. "The Germans have a joiner of wonderful intelligence —the king himself always asks for his advice."

It appeared on my investigations that he was speaking of Bebel.

"How is it that you know of him?"

"I know," he answered shortly, scratching his lumpy skull with his little finger.

Shaposhnikoff was not interested in the hubbub of life, he was too engrossed in the denial of God, his ridiculing of the clergy, hating especially the monks.

One day Rubzoff amicably asked him: "Jakov, why is it that you grumble the whole time only about God?"

And Jakov howled still more fiercely: "Is there anything else that lies in my way? For nearly twenty years I believed, I lived in the terror of Him and bore everything patiently. To discuss that was not allowed. Everything was established from above! I lived in ties. Then I read the Bible properly and saw the whole thing is a put-up job. Everything is, Nikita!" And stretching out his hand, as though tearing at the "unseen thread," he cried:

"There, through all this, I die before my time!"

I had several other good friends and often went into the bakery of Semenoff to see my old comrades who always greeted me with joy and listened to me readily. But Rubzoff lived in the Admiralteisky suburb, and Shaposhnikoff in the Tartar one, at a distance of about five versts from each other, and I could go to them very rarely. And they could not come to see me, for I had no place to receive my guests. Also the new baker, a soldier in retreat, was acquainted with policemen—the back of the police station was connected with our yard and the stiff "blue uniforms" used often to scramble over the hedge to take rolls for the Colonel Nanhardt and bread for themselves. I was told, too, not to "come out too much in the light" in order not to attract attention to the bakery. I realised that my work was no longer essential. It happened oftener and oftener that people, not considering the profit of the business, drew money from the cash so imprudently, so that there often was not sufficient money to pay for the flour. Derenkov, pulling at his beard, gloomly smiled:

"We'll soon be bankrupt."

He was not getting on well; the red-haired Nastja was "in an interesting condition" and hissed like a cat, looking at everyone and everything with a green, offended glance. She used to walk at Andrei, as though not noticing him, and he guiltily would get out of her way and sigh.

Sometimes he complained to me. "This is not all serious. They all grab at everything! I bought myself half a dozen pairs of socks lately and—they've all disappeared already!" That was funny—about the socks—but I did not laugh, seeing what efforts were made by this modest, disinterested man, trying to organise a business which could be of some good to others, while everybody else was trying lightheartedly and carelessly to destroy it. Derenkov did not count on the gratitude of people for whom he worked, but he had a right to mere attention and friendly treatment and did not get it. His family fell to pieces very rapidly—his father suddenly became a religious maniac, the younger brother started drinking and going about with street-girls; his sister behaved like a stranger in the house and was evidently on the verge of a sad love affair with the red-haired student; I often noticed that her eyes were swollen from tears and I grew to hate the student.

I thought myself in love with Maria Derenkova. I was also in love with the girl at the counter in our bakery, Nadijda Shcherbatova, a plump, red-cheeked girl, with an eternal smile on her red lips. I was altogether in love. My age, my nature and all the entanglements of my life sought for a connection with a woman. I needed badly a woman's affection, or, at least, her friendly attention. I wanted to be able

to speak sincerely of myself, throw some light on the confusion of disconnected ideas and the chaos of impressions.

I had no friends. The people who looked upon me, as on "material demanding to be cultivated," did not rouse any sympathies or provoke my open-heartedness. When I spoke to them of things which did not interest them—they advised me: "Let this be!"

Guri Pletnev was arrested and taken to Petersburg, to the prison "Kresti." The first to tell me of this was Nikiforich, whom I met in the early morning in the street. Stepping solemnly and pensively in front of me, all his medals adorning his breast—as though returning from a parade—he lifted his hand to his cap and silently turned away from me, but stopped immediately and growled behind my back:

"Guri Alexandrovich has been arrested tonight. . . ."

And with a gesture of despair added, lowering his voice and looking aside: "He's done for, the youth!" It seemed to me that tears shone in his cunning eyes.

I knew that Pletnev expected to be arrested—he had warned me of this himself and had advised me as well as Rubzoff, with whom he was also on friendly terms, not to meet him. Nikiforich, looking down at his feet, asked dully:

"Why don't you come to me any more?"

I came to him in the evening. He had just awakened and was sitting up in bed, drinking kvas. His wife was mending a pair of trousers by the window. "Yes—ye-es, so it is!" said the policeman, scratching his broad chest, overgrown with raccoon hairs, and

watching me pensively. "They've arrested him. They found a frying-pan in his room, in which he boiled the paint for the leaflets against the Emperor!"

And he spat on the floor, shouting angrily to his wife:

"Here with the trousers!"

"In a minute," she answered, without lifting up her head.

"She pities him and cries over him," the old man continued, pointing to his wife. "I pity him, too, but what can a student do against the Emperor?"

He started dressing, but continued to speak:

"I will go out for a minute . . . the kettle, you . . .!"

His wife was staring motionless out of the window, but as soon as he got out of the sentry box she, turning rapidly, showed a tightly set fist to the door and with a great fierceness hissed between her teeth:

"You—you old skunk!"

Her face was swollen with tears, her left eye was closed by a bruise. She jumped up, went to the stove and hissed, bending over the kettle:

"I'll get the better of him, I will. I'll set him howling like a wolf from pain. Don't you believe him, don't you believe a word he says; he's trying to catch you. He's lying, he has no pity for anyone. The fisherman! He knows all about you all. That's what he lives on. It's like a hunt for him, to catch people. . . ."

She came up to me very near and, with the voice of a beggar, said: "Won't you give me a kiss, eh?" That woman was repulsive to me, but her eye looked at me with such a fierce, sharp longing that I put my

arms round her and stroked her harsh hair, dishevelled and greasy.

"Whom is he watching now?"

"On the Ribnoriadskaia, someone who lives there in rooms."

"The names you don't know?" she continued, smiling. "Look out, or I will tell him what you have been asking me about! Here he is. . . . He found out Burochana. . . ." And she jumped back to the stove. Nikiforich brought a bottle of vodka, some bread and jam. We sat down to drink tea. Marina, sitting next to me, looked after me with emphasised tenderness, peering into my face with her normal eye, while her husband instructed me:

"That unseen thread lies deep in the hearts, in the bones. You can well try to break it! The Tsar is a God to the people!" And then unexpectedly asked me:

"You, here, are a well-read man. You've read the Bible, haven't you? Well, do you think that all it says there is right?"

"I don't know."

"Well, I think there's a lot of unnecessary things in it. A lot of them. For instance about the beggars: Blessed are the beggars . . . what is it they are blessed with? Quite useless altogether; about the poor there is a lot of queer things. One must distinguish the poor from the one who has become poor. If he's poor, it means he's no good. But the one who's become poor, it might be he was unlucky? That's the way one ought to reason. It would be better so."

"Why?"

He watched me searchingly, remained silent and

again began speaking distinctly and with weight, evidently having thought the whole thing well over:

"There's too much pity and compassion in the Bible, and compassion is an unwholesome feeling! So I think. Compassion demands huge expenses for unnecessary and even corrupting people. Almshouses, prisons, madhouses. One must help strong, healthy people, see that they should not waste their energy unwontingly. And we help the weak—as if we could make a strong man out of a weak one! From all this rubbish the strong get weak and the weak scramble on their necks. This is what one ought to think about! Try and alter it. One must realise that life has turned away from the Bible—her way is another one! You see why Hetneff went to the dogs? Out of compassion. We give to the poor and the students go under. Is there reason in that, eh?"

I was hearing these ideas for the first time in such sharp words, although I had come in contact with them before; they are more vital and have a greater spread than is supposed. About seven years after this, reading Nietzsche, I very vividly remembered the psychology of the Kazan policeman. I will say as a matter of fact that it has happened to me very rarely to strike against ideas in books which I had not met before in life. And the old "fisher of men" was talking on, striking the edge of the dish with his fingers to the rhythm of his words. His dry face frowned sternly, but he did not look at me—he looked instead into the brass looking-glass of the brightly glistening kettle. "You must go now, it is time," his wife reminded him several times. He never answered her, but, stringing word after word on the

shaft of his thought, he suddenly flowed into a new channel. "You are a clever fellow, you can read, is it suitable that you should be a baker? You could have gained much more by serving the Tsar's kingdom in a different fashion. . . ."

Listening to him, I kept thinking, how to warn the strangers on the Ribnoriadskaia that Nikiforich was watching them?—There, in some rooms, lived a Sergei Somoff, a man just returned from exile in Jalontorovsk, of whom I had heard very interesting things. "Clever people must live in heaps—like, for instance, bees in a hive or wasps in their nests. The Tsar's kingdom . . ."

"Look—it is already nine o'clock," said the woman.

"The devil!"

Nikiforich got up, buttoning his uniform.

"Well, I'll go in a cab to save time. Good-bye, old chap! Come on whenever you like, do!"

Leaving the sentry-box, I swore I would never come again to "have tea" with Nikiforich—he was repulsive to me, although his way of thinking interested me very much. His words on the unwholesomeness of compassion agitated me strongly and ground themselves into my mind very deeply. I felt there was some truth in them, and it was somehow offensive that it should have come from a policeman.

. . . . . .

Discussions on that topic were not rare and one of them drove me especially into a state of furious agitation. A "Tolstoyan" had appeared in town. It was the first one I had met: a tall, sinewy man, swarthy of face, with the black beard of a goat and

the thick lips of a negro. He walked with a stoop and watched the ground, but at times with a brusque movement he would throw back his bald head and scold with the passionate gleam of his dark moistened eyes; a kind of hatred burnt in his sharp glance. We were sitting and talking together in the flat of a professor, where there were a great number of young people and among them a slim, refined little priest, a doctor of theosophy, in a black silk cassock. It showed off to a great advantage his pale handsome face, lit by the dry little smile of a pair of cold grey eyes.

The Tolstoyan spoke a long time of the eternal inflexibility of the great truths of the Bible; his voice was a trifle smothered, his sentences short, but the words rang out harshly. One felt in them the intensity of true faith; he accentuated them by a monotonous, cutting gesture of his hairy left hand; the right one was stuck into his trouser pockets.

"An actor," one heard whispered in the corner.

"Yes, he is very theatrical, there is no doubt of that. . . ."

I had just read a book—I think it was by Frepaire —of the struggle led by Catholics against science, and it seemed to me that in front of me was one of those who believed fiercely in the salvation of the world through the intensity of love, who are ready out of clemency to people to cut them to pieces and burn them on fires.

He was dressed in a white shirt with broad sleeves and a little old grey overcoat—this, too, distinguished him from the others. At the end of his sermon he cried:

"Now tell me—are you with Christ or with Darwin?"

He threw this question like a stone into the corner were the young sat and from where glances of fear and admiration were directed at him by the young men and girls. His speech had evidently amazed everyone—for they sat silent, with heads bent down. He looked round with a burning glance and added, sternly:

"Only Pharisees can attempt to combine these two irreconciliable theses and by doing this they lie shamelessly to themselves and corrupt others with their lies. . . ." Then the priest got up, carefully threw back the sleeves of his cassock and spoke again, fluently, with a poisonous kindness and a condescending smile.

"You evidently sustain the old vulgar opinion of Pharisees, which is, however, not only coarse but also totally unfair. . . ."

And, to my great amazement, he started proving that Pharisees were honest and true guardians of the sacred testament of the Hebrews and that the people always joined with them against their enemies.

"Take, for instance, Flavius Josephus. . . ."

Jumping up and cutting Josephus to pieces with a crushing gesture, the Tolstoyan shouted:

"Now, too, the people march with their enemies against their friends, but the people march against their will, they are driven and violated! What do I care about your Josephus!"

The little priest and the others had torn the fundamental topic of the discussion into small bits and dissipated it. "Truth is *love*," exclaimed the Tol-

stoyan and his eyes sparkled with hatred and disdain.

I felt myself intoxicated with these words, hardly able to grasp the thoughts hidden in them, the earth under my feet was unsteady, shaken by a whirlwind of words, and I often felt with despair that there did not exist in the world a man more dull and stupid than I was. And the Tolstoyan, wiping the sweat off his purple face, cried fiercely, "Throw away the Bible, forget it, in order not to lie! Crucify Christ for a second time, that will be more honest!"

Before me stood the question: if life is an uninterrupted struggle for happiness on earth—then clemency and love must only interfere with the success of the struggle?

I got to know the name of the Tolstoyan. It was Klopsky. I also found out where he lived and went to him on the next evening. He lived in the house of two young girls, owners of a country place in the neighbourhood. He was sitting with them in the garden at a table in the shade of a huge lime-tree. Dressed in white trousers and an equally white shirt, showing a dark hairy chest—long, dry and awkward, he quite corresponded to my idea of the homeless Apostle, the preacher of the truth.

He was eating raspberries and milk with a silver spoon, and swallowed them with relish, smacking his fat lips and blowing the white drops after every spoon from his scarce whiskers which were like those of a cat. One young girl stood at the table handing the dish to him; the other leant against the trunk of the lime-tree, her hands folded on her breast, looking dreamily into the dusty, hot sky.

They were both dressed in light lilac dresses and were wonderfully alike.

He spoke to me kindly and readily of the creative force of love, saying that one ought to develop in one's soul that feeling, as the only one capable of "connecting man with the spirit of the world"—with the love which is dispersed everywhere in life.

"It is only through this that you can tie a man up. Without love—you cannot understand life. Those who say that the law of life is struggle are blind souls doomed to perdition. Fire is not to be conquered by fire just as evil is not to be conquered by the strength of evil."

But when the young girls, arm in arm, disappeared inside the garden, towards the house, that man, looking at them with half-closed eyes, asked:

"And you—who are you?"

And on hearing my story he began to tell me, striking his fingers on the table, that a man was a man everywhere and that one ought not to strive to change one's place in life, but to develop the spirit in a feeling of love for people.

"The lower a man stands the nearer he is to the real truth of life, to its sacred wisdom. . . ."

I felt doubtful as to his knowledge of that "sacred wisdom," but kept silent, noticing that he was bored by my presence—he looked at me with a repulsive glance, yawned, threw his arms about the back of his head, stretched out his feet, and, shutting his eyes with an air of exhaustion, muttered as if half-asleep:

"An entire submission to love is the law of life. . . ."

He started, threw up his hands as if grasping at something in the air and stared at me in terror:

"What? I'm tired, forgive me." Then he again closed his eyes and drew his teeth together as if in pain, disclosing them; his lower lip went down and the upper one lifted up and the sparse bluish whiskers stiffened.

I went away with an hostile feeling towards him and a vague doubt concerning his sincerity.

A few days after I brought some rolls to a doctor friend of mine, a bachelor and a drunkard, and there again I met Klopsky. He had probably spent a sleepless night, for his face was ashen grey and his eyes red and swollen; it seemed to me that he was drunk. The fat little doctor, drunk to tears, was sitting in his underclothes on the floor among a chaos of displaced furniture, beer bottles, overcoats; he had a guitar in his hands and, rocking to and fro, growled:

"The gates of mercy be opened to us. . . ."

Klopsky sharply and angrily shouted:

"There is no mercy! We will petrify through love or be crushed in the struggle for love; it is all one; we are doomed to perdition. . . ."

Grabbing me by the shoulder, he dragged me into the room and said to the little doctor: "There now, ask him, what is it he wants? Ask him, does he want love for people?"

The doctor looked at me with watery eyes and laughed.

"That's the baker. I owe him money." He strived to keep his balance, stuck his hand into his pocket, took out a key and handed it to me.

"There, take everything you want."

But the Tolstoyan, snatching the key from me, motioned me to the door.

"You can go. You'll get what you need later on."

And flung the rolls received from me onto the sofa in the corner.

He did not recognise me and I was very glad of it. When I left them I carried away in my memory his words of the perdition through love and a repulsion for him in my heart. Very soon I heard that he had declared his love to one of the young girls at whose house he lived, and on the same day to the other one. The sisters imparted to each other their joy and it soon turned into a hatred towards the lover; they ordered the servant to tell the preacher to leave their house immediately. He disappeared from the town.

The question as to the meaning of love and mercy in the lives of men, a terrible and complicated question, rose early in life and in front of me—at first in the shape of a vague but sharp sensation of disharmony in my soul, then in the definite shape of clear and distinct words:

"What is the part played by love?"

All that I had read was imbued with ideas of Christianity, humanism, clamours of compassion for people, for the best people I knew at that time spoke of this eloquently and passionately.

All that I could observe directly was entirely strange to all compassion for people. Life was stretched out in front of me like an uninterrupted chain of cruelty and hatred, like an endless filthy

struggle for the possession of trifles. I personally needed only books—the rest had no importance in my eyes.

It was enough to go out in the street and sit for an hour at the gate to understand that all these cabmen, porters, workmen, officials and merchants lead another life than I and the people I cared for, that they sought other aims and went different ways—those, however, whom I respected and believed in were strangely isolated and superfluous among the majority who were building up life in the dirty little cunning work of bustling ants. That life seemed to me ridiculous all through in its stupidity and deadly dulness. And often I noticed that people were merciful and loving only in words, submitting in their actions to the common order of life.

I was taking all this very hard. One day the veterinary surgeon Lavroff, all yellow and swollen from hydropsy, told me, breathing heavily:

"One must endeavour to bring cruelty to such a point of development that people should tire of it, that it should become repulsive to everyone, like this cursed autumn, for instance." The autumn was an early one, it was rainy and cold, and rich with epidemics and suicides. Lavroff also poisoned himself with "kali zianicum," not wanting to wait to be smothered by hydropsy.

"He gave medical treatment to animals—and died like one!" was the epitaph pronounced by his landlord, the tailor Mednikoff, a thin little pious man who knew by heart all the acathistus to the Virgin Mary. He used to smack his children—a girl of seven and a schoolboy of eleven—with a three-edged

strap and beat his wife on the legs with a bamboo cane and then complain:

"The judge sentenced me, saying that I had intercepted this system from a Chinese, when I never in my life saw a Chinese except in pictures and posters."

One of his apprentices, a gloomy crooked-legged man, whose nickname was "the husband of Dunka," used to say of his master:

"I'm afraid of those meek men who are pious. A raging man one notices directly, and one has time to hide from him, whereas the meek one crawls onto you unawares like the crafty serpent in the grass, and all of a sudden stings you in the most disclosed part of your soul. . . . Yes, I'm afraid of the meek. . . ."

In the words of the "husband of Dunka," a meek and cunning little spy loved by Mednikoff, there was some truth.

It seemed to me sometimes that the meek, mollifying ones lighten the stony heart of life, soften and fertilise it, but oftener, observing the number of the meek, their skilful adaptability to everything mean, the vague changefulness and flexibility of their souls, their appalling complaints, I felt myself like a horse tied up amidst a cloud of gad-flies. I thought of all this as I walked away from the policeman.

. . . . . .

The wind sighed and the lights of the lanterns trembled, but it looked as though it were the dark grey sky that trembled, sowing an October rain as thin as dust onto the earth. A wet prostitute was dragging a drunken man along the street, holding him by the hand and pushing him on; he was mutter-

ing something and crying. The woman said in a low, tired voice: "Such is your fate. . . ."

"Yes," I thought, "I, too, am dragged along and pushed into unpleasant corners where I am exhibited all the filth and the sadness and confronted with strangely diverse people. I am tired of it all."

Perhaps I thought of this in different words, but I know that this idea flashed in my mind exactly on that mournful night and I felt there for the first time the weariness of my soul and the caustic mouldiness of my heart. And from that hour I began to suffer badly, looking at myself from aside with a cold, strange, hostile glance.

I noticed that nearly every man clumsily and awkwardly superposes on himself the contradictions not merely of words and of actions, but also of feelings and this capricious game depressed me. I could feel that the same kind of thing was happening to me—and that made it still worse. I was thrown about in different directions, attracted by women and books and workmen and gay students, but I did not get anywhere and lived "nor here—nor there," rolling about head over heels, while a strong, unseen hand lashed me with a hot, unseen whip.

Hearing that Jakov Shaposhnikoff had been taken to a hospital, I decided to go and visit him there, but as I entered the house a crooked-mouthed fat woman in spectacles and a white shawl out of which hung red, unboiled ears, said to me drily:

"He's dead."

And seeing that I remained staring at her instead of going away, she got angry and began screaming at me:

"Well, what more do you want?"

I got angry, too, and said to her: "You are a dunce."

"Nikolai—come and drive this man away!"

Nikolai was wiping some brass rods with a rag; he smacked his lips and lashed me with one of the rods on the back. Then I took him by the scruff of the neck, carried him out on the street and deposited him into a pool of water in front of the hospital. He did not seem at all surprised, treated the whole matter with great calmness. After sitting a few moments there in silence, staring at me with wide-open eyes, he got up and said:

"You dog!"

I went to the garden of Dirgavin and sat there on a bench under the statue of the poet, experiencing a strong desire to commit something evil and hideous, something that would provoke a whole crowd of people to throw themselves at me and thus enable me to beat them. But in spite of the day being a holiday, the garden was desolate and there was not a soul about. The wind alone was fluttering, driving along the dry leaves and rustling with the unglued poster on the lantern. A transparently blue cold twilight descended on the garden. The huge bronze idol rose above me. I watched him and thought: there lived on earth a lonely man Jakov, who was exterminating God with all the strength of his soul and now he is dead and his death is an ordinary, common death. There was in this something very offensive and very hard. And Nikolai was an idiot—he ought to have fought with me or called the police and sent me off to jail. . . .

I went to see Rubzoff. He was sitting in his dis-

mal lodging at his table in front of a small lamp, mending his waistcoat. "Jakov is dead," I told him.

The old man lifted his hand with a needle in it, in the evident desire of crossing himself, but then only made a gesture of despair and, catching at something with the thread, swore softly but expressively and then grumbled:

"Well—we shall die, all of us—such is our stupid custom, yes, old chap! He is dead and another man, a brazier I knew, has also been done for, discounted! Last Sunday, it was, with policemen. I knew him through Guri. A clever fellow! He used to go about a lot with the students. Have you heard, they say the students are striking—is that true? Come here and sew up my waistcoat for me; I don't see a thing! . . ."

He handed me his ragged clothes and the needle and cotton, and, folding his hands on his back, began marching up and down the room, coughing and grunting. "From time to time—here and there—there flashes a light—and then the devil blows it out—and again it is dull! What an unhappy town this is! I will get away from here while the ships still go to and fro on the river. . . ." He stopped, and, scratching his skull, asked: "But where shall I go? I've been everywhere. Yes. I've been everywhere, but have only worn myself out."

He spat on the floor and added:

"What a blasted life! One lives, one lives and one does not find anything—either for the soul or the body!"

He remained silent, standing in the corner by the door as if listening to something, then came up to

me resolutely and sitting down on the edge of the table:

"I'll tell you what, Lexei my Maximich—Jakov was wrong in wasting his big heart on swearing at God. Neither God nor king will become any better if I abjure them, but what one ought to do is to get furious at oneself and renounce all this mean life—there! Ah, had I not been so old, had I come earlier into the world—I'll soon be quite blind—yes, my boy, that will be terrible! You've sewed it up? Thanks. . . . Let's go to the bar and have some tea. . . ."

On the way there, groping at my shoulders in the darkness and tottering, he muttered:

"You remember my word—there will come a day when people will lose their patience and their tempers and start destroying everything—they will crush all their nonsense into dust. Yes, they'll lose patience. . . ."

We never got to the bar, knocking against the siege of a "house of consolation" by the sailors: the gates of this institution were being guarded and protected by workmen of Alafonzoff. "There's a fight here every holiday," Rubzoff said approvingly, taking off his spectacles and recognising among the protectors some of his friends, immediately mixed into the battle, inciting them and setting them on:

"Hold on, factory boys! Squeeze the frogs! Smother the roach, right-o!" It was terrifying and amusing to see the agility and enthusiasm with which the old men acted, pushing through the crowd of sailors, rivermen, repulsing their blows and throwing them to the ground by a push of the shoulder. They all fought without anger, gaily, for the sake of the

fight itself, from an overflow of strength; a dark heap of bodies gathered together at the gates pressing the factory workmen to them; the boards cracked and one could hear provoking screams: "Thrash the bald chief!" Two men scrambled on the roof and from there sang away gaily:

"We're no thieves nor knaves nor highwaymen,
We're only sailor-boys and fishermen!"

The policeman whistled, brass buttons flashed in the darkness, mud splashed under the feet—and from the roof still rang out:

"We throw our nets on dry banks and merchants' houses, on roomy sheds and coach-houses. . . ."

"Hold on! You don't strike a man who's down. . . ."

"Old boy—hold your cheek-bone. Fighters!" Then Rubzoff and I and yet five more enemies or friends were taken to the police station and the calmed shadows of the autumn night followed us with a cheerful song:

"Ah, we've caught the forty pikes
From which one makes fur-coats."

"What splendid folk there are on the Volga!" Rubzoff was saying with rapture, blowing his nose repeatedly and spitting—then he whispered to me:

"You, run along. Choose the right moment and fly! What do you want to go to the police-station for?"

And together with a tall sailor we rushed into a by-street, scrambled over a hedge, and over another one, and from this night I never met again my dear, clever old friend, Nikita Rubzoff. Around me it became gradually desolate. The students' rioting was beginning—its sense I could not grasp—it was unclear to me. I perceived in it a gay bustle, but felt there to be no drama and thought that for the joy of learning in the University one could bear the greatest of tortures. Had anyone proposed to me: "Now, go and learn, but in return, every Sunday on the Nikolai Square, we will thrash you with logs of wood!" I would, most assuredly, have accepted this condition.

One day, passing by the bakery of Semenoff, I heard that the bakers were preparing to go to the University and thrash the students. "We'll go at them with weights!" they said with joyful fierceness. I began to argue with them and swear at them, then suddenly felt that I had no desire and no words to defend the students with. I remember going out of the cellar like a maimed man, with an invincible, deathly grief and longing in my heart. And in the night I sat on the bank of the lake, throwing stones into the black waters and thinking in five words, which I repeated incessantly:

"What am I to do?"

In despair I began to learn to play the violin and used to practice in the night in the shop, disturbing the guard and the mice. I loved music and started to learn with great enthusiasm, but my teacher, the violinist of the Theatre Orchestra, one day during my lesson—I had left the shop for a moment—opened a drawer of the safe which I had forgotten to lock and

on my return I found him filling his pockets with money. Seeing me come in, he stretched out his neck, turned to me his dull, clean-shaven face and said in a low voice: "Well—you can beat me!" His lips trembled, and curious, big, oily tears flew out of his colourless eyes. . . .

I wanted to strike him. To prevent myself from doing so I sat down on the floor, with my fists pressed underneath me, and ordered him to put the money back into the safe. He unloaded his pockets and went to the door, but stopping there, said in an idiotically high and terrible voice:

"Give me ten roubles."

I gave them to him, but left off studying the violin.

In December I decided to commit suicide. I tried to describe the motives of this decision of mine in the story: "An Event in the Life of Makar." But my attempt was not successful—the story came out in a clumsy unpleasant way and lacked inner truth. One of its merits is, so I think, the absolute lack of truth in it. The facts are truthful, but they look as though they were described by some one else and as though the whole story were not about me.

Having bought the revolver of a trumpeter at the market I found it loaded with four cartridges and shot at my chest, thinking to strike the heart, but only succeeded in perforating a lung, and in a month, feeling very discountenanced and silly, I was again working in the bakery. But that was not for long. One evening at the end of March, as I returned to the shop from the bakery I found in my room the "Khokhol" sitting on a chair at the window, pensively smoking a thick cigarette and watching attentively the

clouds of smoke rising in the air. "Are you free?" he asked before even having greeted me.

"Yes, for twenty minutes."

"Sit down, let's have a talk." He was, as always, tightly bound up in a coat of black leather, his fair beard was spread on his broad chest and over an obstinate forehead bristled hard, short-cut hair. He wore thick peasants' boots from which emanated a strong smell of tar.

"Well," he began quietly and not loudly, "don't you want to come and stay with me? I live in the village Krasnovidovo forty-five versts down the Volga. I've got a shop there, you can help me along with it; that will take up little of your time. I have also got a lot of good books and will assist you in your studies. Well, what do you think of this—do you agree?"

"Yes."

"Then I'll expect you on Friday at the harbour of Kurbatoff; ask there for the cargo-boat from Krasnovidovo, belonging to Vassili Pankov. But I'll be on the place by that time and will catch sight of you. So long!" He got up and stretched out his broad palm to me—with the other hand he was getting out of his breast pocket a huge round silver watch at which he looked and said:

"We've done it in six minutes. Oh, yes: my name is Mikheilo Antonovich Romass. That's so."

He went out, without turning round, putting his feet firmly on the ground and carrying with ease his powerful, well-cast body.

Two days later I sailed to Krasnovidovo. The Volga has just broken up; grey, mellowed blocks of

ice float unsteadily on the surface of the troubled waters, the flat-bottomed ship overtakes them and they rub against the stern, creaking and crumbling into pointed crystals from the shock. A high wind is playing about, throwing the waves fiercely against the bank; the sun shines radiantly and is reflected in vividly white trusses by the bluish glass of the ice-blocks. The cargo-boat, heavily loaded with barrels, sacks and cases, has set its sail. The young peasant Pankov, smartly dressed in a coat of sheepskin embroidered with many-coloured braid, is steering. His face is peaceful; his eyes have a cold glance; he is silent and reminds one little of a peasant. On the prow of the ship, with outspread legs stands Pankov's workman, Kukushkin, a dishevelled little peasant in a tattered over-coat, tied up with a string, and a crumpled priest's hat. His face is covered with bruises and scratches. He pushes about the ice-blocks with his huge boat-hook and swears contemptuously:

"Get out of the way, you!"

I am sitting with Romass on packing-cases under the sail and he speaks to me softly:

"The peasants don't like me, especially the rich ones. That hostility will pass on to you, of course."

Kukushkin, placing the hook across the stern, under his feet, says rapturously, turning his face to us:

"The priest, Antonovich, is the one who hates you the most! . . ."

"That's true," confirms Pankov.

"You're like a bone in the ugly dog's throat!"

"But I have some friends too and you will have some also," I can hear the Khokhol saying. It is cold. The sun of March warms poorly.

Kukushkin, filling his pipe with tobacco, philosophises:

"Well, of course, you're not the priest's wife, but, according to his profession his duty's to love every being, as it says in books."

"Who is that licked you so hard?" asks Romass, laughing. "Peuh! Some men of dark professions; skunks they were, surely!"

Kukushkin answers contemptuously and with pride:

"No, that's all rot! but it happened once that artillerymen beat me when I was all by myself! That was some fight, I assure you! I can't make out how it was that I kept alive!"

"What did they beat you for?" asks Pankov.

"When? Yesterday? Or the artillerymen?"

"Well, yesterday!"

"How should I know what they beat one for? Our men are like goats—you want only to touch them—they go at you. They think it's their profession to fight!"

"I suppose," put in Romass, "that it is for your tongue that they beat you; you're far too incautious. . . ."

"That may be! I have a curious mind, and I've got the habit of asking about things. And I am glad when I learn something new!" The prow of the ship struck hard against an ice-block, the stern creaked fiercely. Kukushkin snatched his gaff, while Pankov remarked reproachfully: "Look out for your business, Stepan!"

They continue quarrelling good-naturedly, while Romass explains to me:

"The ground is worse here than it is in our Ukraine,

but the people are better. Very capable people they are!"

I listen to him, attentively, and believe in every word he says. I like his calmness and his wonderfully even speech, so simple and carrying weight. One feels that this man knows a lot and that he has his own standard for people. I am particularly glad that he does not ask me the reason why I tried to kill myself? Every other man in his place would have wanted to know about it long ago and that question bored me so intensely. It is so hard to answer it. The devil alone knows why I wanted to kill myself; I would have probably given some lengthy and absurd explanation of it to the Khokhol. And altogether I did not want to think of it at all. It is so nice to be on the Volga, everything here is so free and bright.

The ship sails along the bank. On its left, the river expands very far, breaking into the sandy bank of the pastures. One can see how the water rushes onto the shore, flooding and shaking the bushes that grow on the coast and there joins with the clear and stormy currents of spring brooks, flowing along the clefts and hollow ways of the earth. The sun smiles, young rooks sparkle in its rays with the black steel of their feathers and busily croak as they build their nests. On the places exposed to the ardour of sun-rays, the bright green bristle of grass touchingly makes its way through the earth towards the sun. The body is cold, but the soul sings with a quiet joy that also brings forth the tender buds of luminous hopes. How splendid the earth looks in spring!

I hear the voice of the Khokhol coming to me as in a dream.

"There is a fisherman there but I am sure you will like him. . . ."

We reached Krasnovidovo about midday. There, on a high steep hill rises the blue cupola of a church from which are stretched out, in a line, on the edge of the hill, strong, well-built huts, glistening with the yellow planks of their roofs and the brocaded shelters of straw. It is all simple and beautiful.

How often have I admired that village as I sailed past it on the ships! When I began to unload our cargo-boat together with Kukushkin, Romass, handing me the sacks from the stern, remarked:

"By Jove, you've got some strength!" And without looking at me:

"And your chest—does it ache?"

"Not at all."

I was greatly moved by the tact concealed in his question—far less than anything else did I want the peasants to know of my attempt at suicide.

Down the slope of the hill, stepping in pools sparkling like silver, came a long, thin peasant, making large strides, slipping and swinging from side to side. He was bare-footed and wore only a shirt and a pair of trousers, his beard curled like that of an apostle and his hair formed a thick reddish hat on his head. Coming up to the shore he shouted in a loud and friendly voice:

"Welcome!"

He turned round, lifted a thick rod, then another one, placed them leaning on the stern and jumping lightly on board the flat-bottomed ship, commanded:

"Lean with your feet on the rods to prevent them

from gliding from the stern, and receive the barrels. Come here, you lad over there, and help!"

He was picturesquely handsome and evidently very strong. On his pink face, with a large, straight nose, his blue eyes flashed sternly.

"You'll get a cold, Isot," said Romass.

"I? Don't you fear."

We rolled the barrel of petroleum on to the shore. Isot asked, looking at me from head to foot:

"A clerk?"

"You try and fight with him!" proposed Kukushkin.

"I see someone's been having a go at your nose again?"

"What's one got to do with them?"

"With whom?"

"Wi' those who beat. . . ."

"You hopeless creature . . ." said Isot, with a sigh, and turned to Romass.

One could notice that the man treated Romass with friendly and slightly patronising solicitude, although Romass was about ten years his senior. And in half an hour I was sitting in the clean and cosy room of a brand new hut, whose walls had not yet lost the smell of resin and tow. A quick, sharp-eyed woman was setting the table for supper. Romass was unpacking cases with books and laying them on the shelf near the stove.

"Your room is in the attic," he told me.

Out of the window in the attic one can see a part of the village and the ravine in front of our hut, where the roofs of bath-houses lie hidden among the bushes.

Beyond the ravine—are the gardens and the black fields, disappearing in soft curves towards the blue crests of the wood, far away on the horizon. Sitting astride on the roof of the bath-house is a blue peasant holding in one hand an axe, while the other one is pressed to his forehead as he watches the Volga below. A cart is creaking on its wheels, from afar one can hear the doleful lowing of a cow, and the murmur of brooks. An old woman all dressed in black comes out of the gate and turning back to it says resolutely:

"May you all croak!"

Two urchins, busily stopping the flow of the brook with stones and mud, rush away at the sound of her voice, while she, lifting a chip of wood from the ground, spits on it and throws it into the water. Then, stepping in a man's high boots, she destroys the construction of the boys and goes down towards the river.

How shall I live over here?

We are summoned for supper. Downstairs, Isot sits at the table, stretching out his long feet with purple soles and talks about something, but stops, seeing me come.

"Well?" frowns Romass. "Go on."

"There's nothing more to say. I've told you everything. It remains that we have decided to settle everything ourselves. You must go about with a revolver or at least with a thick cane. We mustn't speak too freely before Barinoff—both he and Kukushkin have the loose tongues of women. And you, my boy, do you like fishing?"

"No."

Romass began talking of the necessity of organising

the peasants and the small orchard owners and tearing them out of the grip of engrossers. Isot listened to him attentively and said:

"The 'peace-eaters' will give you some trouble, for sure."

"We'll see."

"There's no doubt of that!"

I watched Isot and kept thinking:

"Surely, this is the kind of peasant about whom Karonin and Zlatovrutsky write their stories. . . ."

Was it possible that I had succeeded at last in approaching something earnest and that from now on I was to work with people of real action?

Isot, having finished his dinner, was saying:

"You, Mikheilo Antonovich, don't you be in a hurry. No good ever comes of acting in haste. All must be done at leisure."

When he had gone, Romass said thoughtfully:

"He is a clever, honest fellow. It is a pity that he is not educated. He can hardly read. But he studies obstinately. You must help him in that."

Until late at night he acquainted me with the prices of the wares in the shop and explained to me: "I sell cheaper than do the two other shopkeepers in the village—of course they don't like that. They play dirty tricks on me and intend to beat me. I live here not because I like it or find the trade profitable, but for other reasons. It is an idea rather like the one of your bakery. . . ."

I told him that I had guessed so much.

"Well . . . yes. . . . What is there else to do but to teach people reason, eh?"

The shop was locked up, we walked about in it,

lamp in hand, and on the street someone was always walking about, carefully stepping in the mud and at times heavily scrambling onto the steps of the entrance.

"Do you hear that noise? That's Kirilka, a drunkard and a pauper, a wicked animal, who likes to do wicked things like a pretty girl does flirting. Be careful what you say to him and altogether. . . ."

Afterwards, in the room, having lighted his pipe, and leaning with his broad back to the stove with half-closed eyes, he blew ringlets of smoke into his beard and slowly building up a clear and simple speech, told me that he had noticed long ago, how uselessly I was spending the years of my youth.

"You are a gifted fellow, stubborn by nature and, as it seems, with the best of aspirations. You must learn, but it must be in such a way that the book should not shut out the people to you. A little old sectarian once said very justly: 'Every knowledge emanates from man.' People teach more brutally and painfully but their knowledge impregnates itself more strongly."

He spoke of the idea, which was so familiar to me: that at first one should strive to awaken the intellect of the country. But in the familiar words I perceived a new and deeper sense.

"Your students, over there, they talk a lot of their love for the people. I'll say this to them: one cannot love the people. Those are mere words: love for the people . . ." He laughed into his beard, looked at me searchingly and began walking up and down the room, continuing to speak very impressively. "To love means to agree, to be indulgent, to leave unno-

ticed, to forgive. With all that one must go to a woman. But—is it possible not to notice the ignorance of the people, to agree with the errors of their mind, to indulge in all their meannesses and forgive all their cruelties? Do you think it is?"

"No."

"You see? You all, over there, you sit and read and sing Nekrasoff; well, you know, you won't go far with Nekrasoff. This is what one must inspire in the peasant: you, my dear man, you are not a bad person as far as you are concerned, but you live badly and are incapable yourself of doing anything that should improve and adorn your life. An animal is more reasonable in this way, he looks after himself, and the animal certainly depends upon himself better. Everything grows out of you, the simple peasant: the nobility, the clergy, the scientists, the kings—they have all been peasants. You see? You understand? Well, therefore you must learn to live, so as no one would get the better of you."

He went into the kitchen and told the woman to put the kettle to boil, then started showing me his books, nearly all of them treating on scientific matters: Buckle, Lowell, Hartpole, Lecky, Lubbock, Taylor, Mill, Spencer, Darwin—and the Russians —Pissareff, Dobrolinkov, Chernishevsky, Pushkin, "Fregat Pallada" of Goncharoff, and Nekrasoff.

He stroked them with his broad palm as gently as though they were kittens and explained, excitedly: "Good books, these are! This is a very rare one: the censor had it burnt. You must read it if you want to know what a state is."

He handed me Hobbes' "Leviathan." "This too

speaks of the state but in a much lighter and gayer shape." The gay book proved to be Machiavelli's "The Prince."

At the tea-table he told me shortly about himself. He was the son of a Tchernigov blacksmith, and used to grease the trains at the Station Kiev; there he became acquainted with revolutionaries and organised a small self-educating circle of workmen. After that he was arrested and imprisoned for about two years, then exiled into the Jakoutsk district for ten years.

"At the beginning, living there among the Jakouts, in a nomad encampment, I thought I'd go under. The winter there, bless it, is such, you know, that the brains of a man literally freeze up. It is true that brains there are of no use whatever. Then I saw that some Russians were stuck here and there, not many of them, but still, there were some! And in order they should not be lonely, from time to time others would be kindly sent to join them. There lived the student Vladimir Korolenko, for instance—he is also back by now. I lived on good terms with him—but afterwards we separated. We were too alike in many ways and friendships never prosper on likenesses. But he was an earnest, obstinate man, adept in every kind of work. He even painted ikons—this I did not like. Now, they say he writes very well in different reviews."

We talked for a long time, until midnight, for he evidently wished to establish me immediately and firmly at his side. It was the first time that I felt so earnestly at my ease with a man. After my attempt at suicide, my self-estimation had suffered considerably, I felt myself to be a nobody, I had a guilty conscience and I was ashamed to live. I think Romass

understood this and in a simple, human way opened to me the door into his own life. And by doing so—straightened me out. An unforgettable day it was!

We opened the shop on Sunday after church and the peasants immediately began gathering round our entrance. The first to come was Matrei Barinoff, an unwashed, dishevelled man with the long arms of a monkey and an absent-minded look in his handsome, rather feminine eyes:

"What does one hear in town?" he asked after having greeted us and, without waiting for an answer, shouted out to Kukushkin:

"Stepan! Your cats have guzzled the cock up again!"

And then he told us that the Governor had gone to Petersburg to see the Tsar and solicit that all the Tartars should be transplanted to the Caucasus and Turkestan. He praised the Governor. "He is a clever one. Knows his business."

"You've invented all this yourself," Romass remarked quickly.

"I? When?"

"I don't know."

"How little you believe in people, Antonovich," said Barinoff reproachfully, shaking his head compassionately: "I can say—I pity the Tartars. One needs to get used to the Caucasus."

A small, thin little man approached cautiously, wearing a tattered jacket evidently not belonging to him; his grey face was distorted with a convulsion that tore open his dark lips into a sickly smile; his sharp left eye winked incessantly and over it trembled a grey eyebrow cut up in scars.

"Salute to Migun!" Barinoff said mockingly. "What is it you've stolen to-night?"

"Your money," answered Migun in a tenor voice, taking off his hat to Romass.

The owner of our hut also came out and our neighbour Pankov, too, in a waistcoat and a red handkerchief tied round his neck, rubber shoes on his feet and a silver chain, long as a pair of reins, adorning his breast. He measured up Migun with an angry glance.

"If you go on, you old devil, climbing into my orchard, I will poke a pike into you!"

"There we are again, at the usual kind of conversation," quietly remarked Migun, and added, sighing: "How can one live—if one does not thrash?"

Pankov began scolding him, but he only added:

"And why am I an old devil? I'm only forty-six. . . ."

"At Christmas you were fifty-three!" exclaimed Barinoff. "You told us yourself that you were fifty-three! Why do you lie?"

Then came the grave, bearded old peasant Susloff and the fisherman Isot—altogether there were now about ten people. The Khokhol was sitting on the steps at the door of the shop, smoking his pipe and silently listening to the discussion of the peasants, who had all established themselves on the stairs and the benches around him.

Migun and Kukushkin were peacefully discussing the obscure question: who is it that fights more fiercely, the merchant or the nobleman? Kukushkin affirmed that it was the merchant, but Migun defended the

landowner, and his resounding little tenor voice drowned the disordered speech of Kukushkin.

"Mister Fingeroff's father pulled Napoleon Bonaparte by the beard. And Mister Fingeroff himself at times used to grab two men by the scruff of their necks, spread out his hand and strike them together with their foreheads. And the thing was done! Both lay motionless."

"Yes, that'll make one lie down, sure," agreed Kukushkin, adding, however: "Well, anyhow, the merchant eats more than the nobleman. . . ."

The fine looking Susloff, sitting on the top step of the stairs, complained: "The peasant stands unsteadily on the earth, Mikheilo Antonovich! He wasn't allowed to live in that way when there were masters; every man was tied down to his job. . . ."

"Well—why don't you write a petition and beg them to give you back the servitude," answered Isot. Romass looked up at him in silence and began shaking out his pipe on the balustrade.

I was waiting for him to begin speaking. And listening attentively to the disconnected sentences of the peasants, I tried to picture to myself what the Khokhol would say. It seemed to me that he had already missed several opportunities to mix into their conversation. But he followed their discourse with indifferent silence, sitting motionless like an idol and watching how the wind wrinkled up the water in the pools and drove about the clouds, gathering them into one thick grey heap. A ship was driving on the river; from below rose the shrill song of the girls and the sound of an accordion. A drunkard was striding along the street, hiccoughing and growling and swinging his

hands. His legs were folded together in an unnatural fashion and he continually tumbled down in the pools. The peasants spoke slower and slower; their words rang with depression and I too became infected with a gentle sadness, because the cold sky threatened rain and I recalled the incessant noise of the town, the diversity of its sounds, the rapid current of people on the streets, the swiftness of their speech and the quantities of words which excited the mind.

In the evening at the tea-table I asked the Khokhol when was it that he found time to speak with the peasants? "What about?" he asked. And having listened to me carefully: "Well, you know, if I started speaking to them on those topics, and in the street, I'd get sent back to Jakoutsk at once. . . ." He stuck some tobacco into his pipe, lighted it, surrounded himself with smoke and began speaking quietly and memorably of the peasant, whom he considered to be prudent and distrustful. He, the peasant, is afraid of himself, of his neighbour, and still more so of every stranger, said Romass. Thirty years have not yet passed since he has been granted freedom, and every forty-year-old peasant has been born a slave and remembers it only too well. And he thinks: it is hard to understand what is freedom. On first thought freedom seems to mean to live as one likes! But then you perceive that you are surrounded with authorities and that everybody tries to interfere with your life. The Tsar took the peasantry from the landowner—therefore the Tsar now is the sole sovereign over all the peasantry. And again—what does freedom mean, then? All of a sudden the day shall come when the Tsar will explain what it means. The

peasant believes intensely in a Tsar who is the sole sovereign of the earth and of all its riches. As he took the peasants from the landowners—he can in the same way seize the ships and shops from the merchants. The peasant is a Tsarist—he understands that too many cooks spoil the broth. He awaits the day when the Tsar will proclaim to him the meaning of freedom. And then! Seize what you can, all of you! They all wait for that moment to come and are afraid of it at the same time, for every one of them lives on his guard, anxious not to miss the decisive day of a general distribution. And he is afraid of himself, too, for he wants a lot—and there is heaps to get hold of, but how is one to do it? They are all keen on the same thing. And again, all round there is an innumerable amount of authorities clearly hostile to the peasant and, for that matter, also to the Tsar. But one cannot do without them either, for what should come of it all if not a general brawl.

The wind angrily splashed the window-panes with a heavy spring shower. A grey mist floated in the street, and in my soul something dull and grey crawled too. The quiet, low voice continued thoughtfully:

"One must suggest to the peasant that he should gradually learn to transfer the power from the hands of the Tsar into his own, one must tell him that the people should acquire the right of choosing all their authorities out of their own midst—yes, all of them, the policeman and the Governor and the Tsar . . ."

"But that might last for a hundred years."

"And what did you think? That you'll get it all settled by Whitsuntide?" Romass asked seriously.

In the evening he went out and about eleven o'clock

I heard a shot fired out somewhere very near. I rushed into the darkness under the rain and saw Mikheilo Antonovich's big black figure coming to the gate, carefully and leisurely evading the streams of water.

"What, sir? It's I who fired the shot."

"At whom?"

"Some people rushed at me over there, with pikes. I said to them: 'Let me go or I'll fire.' No, they wouldn't listen. So I fired into the sky; that will not harm them."

He stood in the fore-room, taking off his clothes, squeezing out his wet beard and snorting like a horse.

"My shoes are all rotten, damn them! I must go and have a change. Can you clean a revolver? Please do, or else it will grow rusty. You must smear it with oil of some kind. . . ." I was full of admiration for his unshatterable calmness and the gentle obstinacy of his grey eyes. Combing out his hair in front of the glass in the other room, he warned me:

"You must be careful when you go to the village, especially in the evenings, or on holidays—for they will probably want to beat you, too. But don't carry a stick about with you, for that provokes the bullies and can suggest to them that you are afraid. And there is nothing to be afraid of. They are, themselves, rather a cowardly people."

I began living in a splendid way, every day bringing me something new and important. And I greedily read books on natural history, for Romass used to tell me:

"This, Maximich, one must know best of all and before everything else, for all the best intellect of man is concealed in this science." In the evenings,

three times a week, came Isot, and I taught him to read. At first he treated me mistrustfully, with a slightly mocking smile, but after a few lessons he told me good-naturedly:

"You explain well! You ought to become a teacher, my lad. . . ."

And one day he suddenly proposed: "They say you're very strong; let's pull at a stick and see who's got more muscles!"

We got a cane in the kitchen, sat down on the floor and, propping the plants of our feet against one another, tried for a long time to lift one another up. The Khokhol was watching us with a smile and inciting us.

Isot learnt well and very diligently, and often wondered about things in a charming way: sometimes during the lesson he'd suddenly get up, take a book off the shelf and read two or three lines with a great effort, lifting up his eyebrows. Then, blushing fiercely, he'd look at me, saying with amusement:

"Just think! I'm damned if I don't read!"

There was in him a charming and touching ingenuousness, something childish and transparent, and I found him more and more like the fine peasant of whom one reads in books. Like nearly all fishermen, he was a poet, and loved the Volga, the quiet nights, enjoying solitude and a life of contemplation. He watched the stars and asked: "The Khokhol says that it may be that there, too, there is a life like ours; what do you think, can that be true? What if one made a sign to them and asked them how they live? Perhaps better and in a more cheerful way than we do. . . ."

Altogether he was satisfied with his life—he was an orphan and a pauper, and in his quiet and beloved job of a fisherman was not dependent on anyone. But he had an hostility towards the peasants and warned me:

"Don't you believe that they are kind—they are a cunning folk, a false one—don't you be fooled by them. To-day they are one way with you—to-morrow they'll be another. Each sees only himself and anything social they consider a drudgery."

And with a hatred unusual in this man of a soft heart he spoke of the "peace-eaters," the rich. He was handsome and strong and was loved by women, who besieged him.

"Yes, I admit I'm lucky in that matter," he confided good-naturedly. "I know it's offensive to the husbands; I'd also swear were I in their shoes. But how is one to resist being kind to a woman? She is like a second soul of yours. She lives without heart, without a caress, works like a horse—and that's all. The husbands have no time for her—while I am a free man. There are many who know what the husband's fist is like already in the first year of their marriage. Yes, yes, I know I sin in this, that I have some fun with them, but there's one thing I beg of them: don't you be angry with one another—there's enough of me for all of you. Don't envy each other—you're all the same to me, I'm kind to you all. . . ."

And smiling gaily through his beard he continues:

"One day, don't you know, I nearly had a go at a lady. She came from the town for the summer. A beauty, white as milk, and her hair as fair as flax. And such kind blue eyes she had. I used to sell fish

to her and couldn't help looking at her. 'What is it you want?' she asks. 'You can well guess yourself,' I tell her. 'Well,' she says, 'you wait and I'll come to you in the night.' And she came. Only she felt awkward on account of the mosquitoes, they were biting her the whole time—so that we didn't get along at all. 'I can't,' she said; 'they bite so frightfully,' and she nearly cried over it. The day after, her husband arrived, a judge of some kind. Yes, so they are, the ladies," he ended with sadness and reproach. "Mosquitoes get into their way. . . ."

Isot praised Kukushkin very strongly. "You watch him—he is a good sort! He isn't liked, but that's wrong! He's got a loose tongue, it is true, but then —every—"

Kukushkin had no land and was married to a drunken workwoman, a small but a very strong and wicked little creature. He had let his hut to the smith and lived himself in the bath-house, working at Cankova. He revelled in news and when there was none to be told he invented himself the most incredible stories, always stringing them onto the same thread. "Mikheilo Antonovich—have you heard? The policeman from Tinkovo is going to become a monk; 'I'm darned,' he says, 'if I'm going to go on bullying the peasants. If that's my profession, to hell with it!' "

The Khokhol replies seriously: "If you don't look out, all the authorities will scatter like this and leave you all to yourselves."

Kukushkin considers this possibility, in the meantime pulling straw, hay and corn out of his uncombed flaxen hair.

The village considers Kukushkin a nonentity, and

his stories and peculiar thoughts exasperate the peasants and provoke their mockeries and strong words. But they always listen to him with interest and attention as though expecting to find some truth among his fanciful ideas.

"An empty-headed beggar," so he is called by steady people. And only the fopling Pankov says earnestly:

"Stepan is a man with a secret."

Kukushkin is a very capable workman; he is a cooper, a stove-setter, knows bee-keeping, teaches the women to breed fowl, can make also a clever carpenter, and is always successful in his undertakings, although he works slowly and unwillingly. He loves cats, and keeps about ten fat animals, big and small, in his bath-house.

He used to know how to read, but has forgotten it and does not want to bring it back to his memory. Very clever by nature, he is always the first to grasp the essential meaning in the words of the Khokhol.

"So—so," he says, wrinkling up his face like a child when it is given some bitter medicine, "so Ivan Gresni was not a bad one for small people. . . ." He, Isot and Pankov used to come to us in the evenings and often sat until midnight, listening to the Khokhol's tales on the creation of the world, on the life in foreign countries, on the revolutionary convulsions of the people. Pankov likes the French revolution.

"That's a real turning in life," he approves.

Pankov has let his hut to Romass, and added the shop to it against the wish of all the Crœsuses of the village. They hate him for it, although he treats them with complete indifference, speaks of them contemptuously. Country life rather weighs on him.

"Had I had some kind of profession I'd have lived in town. . . ."

Very neat, always carefully dressed, he carries himself with dignity and is intensely self-conscious; his mind is a cautious and a mistrustful one.

Pankov treated me at first with a certain animosity, I should say even hostility, and tried sometimes to scold me in a masterful fashion, but he soon left off doing this, although I felt all the time that there remained in him a hidden mistrust in my regard, and as to me—I, too, did not care much for him.

I can recall so well the evenings in the clean small room with the whitewashed walls. The windows are closed with shutters, a lamp burns on the table in the corner and in front of it sits a man with a steep forehead, a long beard and closely-cut hair who speaks quietly: "The sense of life lies in the idea that man should get away as far as possible from the beast. . . ."

Three peasants sit listening attentively; all have good eyes and clever faces. Isot always sits motionless, as if listening to a faint rumour perceptible to him alone. Kukushkin fiddles as though bitten by mosquitoes, and Pankov, pulling at his fair moustache, reflects carefully: "So it was necessary all the same for the people to divide into classes. . . ."

It pleases me that Pankov never speaks roughly to Kukushkin, his workman, and always listens attentively to the wonderful fancies of the dreamer.

The discussion finished, I go to my attic and sit there at the open window, watching the sleeping village and the fields where reigns an unbroken silence. The darkness of the night is pierced by the brightness

of the stars, which are the further from me the nearer they are to the earth. The stillness imposingly compresses my heart while the mind flows into the boundless space and enables me to see thousands of villages pressed just as violently to the earth as this one is. All is motionless and peaceful around me.

The life of the village appears to me in all its joylessness. I have often read and heard that people in the country lead a more wholesome and sincere life than those in town. But here I see the peasants living in an untiring drudgery; among them there are many who are wasted and exhausted by incessant toil, and hardly any of them are cheerful. The artisans and workmen of the town, although working no less, live more gaily and do not complain so wearily and monstrously of life as these sullen people. The peasant's life does not seem simple to me—it demands an intense concentration on the earth and a lot of intuitive artfulness in regard to others. And there is no cordiality in this existence, which is so poor of intellect. One perceives that all these people of the village live groping in the darkness like the blind, are incessantly afraid of something, mistrust each other; there is something of the wolf in them.

It is hard for me to understand why they so obstinately dislike the Khokhol, Pankov, and all "our" people, who are striving to live with their reason.

I am distinctly conscious of the superiority of the town, of its thirst for happiness, of the bold inquisitiveness of its mind and the diversity of its aims and aspirations.

And always in nights like this I recall in my memory two citizens of the town:

"F. Kalugin and Z. Nebei
"Watchmakers; also repair diverse instruments of surgery, sewing machines, musical boxes of different systems, other apparatus, etc."

This inscription is to be found over the little narrow door of a small shop. On each side of the door there are two windows covered with dust, and at one of them sits F. Kalugin, a bald man with a yellow bump on his head and a magnifying glass in his eye. He is fat and has a round face which smiles untiringly as he fiddles with miniature pincers in the different watch-works, and sings, opening a round mouth hidden under the grey bristle of a moustache. At the other window sits Z. Nebei, with curly black hair, a huge crooked nose, large plum-shaped eyes and a sharp little beard. He is long and lanky and looks like a Mephistopheles. He also bustles about, arranging and putting in order the tiniest of articles, and from time to time shouts unexpectedly in a low bass:

"Tra-ta-ta-ta-ta."

Behind their backs there rises a chaos of cases and machines, wonderful wheels, aristons, globes; all the shelves are encumbered with metal objects of different shapes, and on the walls are an innumerable quantity of clocks swinging their pendulums. I would readily watch these people at their work the whole day, but my long body obstructs their view; they make the most horrible grimaces at me, brandish their hands and drive me away. I go, thinking with envy: "What happiness lies in knowledge." I respect these people and am convinced that all the mysteries of the machines

and instruments are known to them and that they can repair anything in the world. Those are people for you!

As to the country, I do not like it and the peasants I cannot understand. The women complain mostly of their illnesses; they always have "something that rolls up to the heart" or "presses in the breast," and suffer continually with "pains in the stomach." They speak of all this very willingly, sitting on holidays in front of their huts, or down by the Volga. They are all terribly irritable, and swear at each other fiercely. On account of an earthen jug, worth twelve kopecks, three families fought one day with pikes, broke the arm of an old woman and the shoulder of a young boy. And brawls like that happen every week.

The boys treat the girls with open cynicism and fool about with them; they'll get hold of a girl in the field, lift up her skirts and tie them up like a broom over her head. That is called "making a flower out of her." The girls, naked to the waist, swear at them and yelp, but evidently enjoy that game, for it is noticeable that they untie their skirts more leisurely than is necessary.

In church, at evening mass, the boys pinch the girls' backs—it seems as though they went there for nothing else. The priest, noticing this, spoke to them one Sunday about it from the pulpit.

"You swine! Can you not find another place for your abominations?"

"In the Ukraine the people are, I dare say, greater poets, as far as religion is concerned," says Romass. "Here, under faith in God, one understands the coars-

est instincts of fear and avidity. Here there is no sincere love for God, no raptured admiration of His beauty and strength.

"Maybe it is better so; it will be easier for them to free themselves from religion, for, I assure you, it is the most unwholesome of prejudices!"

The boys here are boastful, but cowardly. They have attempted three times already to thrash me, overtaking me in the street, but up till now they have not succeeded in this; only once they struck my foot with a stick. Of course I did not tell Romass of those encounters, but, noticing that I limped, he guessed, himself, what the matter was.

"Ah, you did get a little surprise all the same, didn't I tell you, eh?" Although he doesn't advise me to go out in the night, I go sometimes to the Volga through the orchards and sit there, under the willows, watching through the transparent veil of the night the river underneath and the pastures beyond it. The stately and slow current of the Volga is rich in golden rays of an unseen sun reflected by a dead moon. I do not like the moon; there is something sinister in it and it rouses in me, as it does in a dog, a sadness and a desire to howl gloomily at it. I rejoiced when I heard that it does not shine with its own light, that it is a dead planet and that there is not and never can be any life on it. Until then I imagined it to be inhabited with coppered people, formed of triangles, who move like compasses and crushingly ring church bells as in fasting-time.

Watching how the stream of the Volga fluctuates the brocaded ray of light and, borne somewhere far away in the darkness, disappears into the black shad-

ows of the hilly bank, I feel my mind becoming steadier and sharper. I experience a peculiar lightness in thinking of something that is not to be expressed in words, something foreign to all that has happened to me in the day. The majestic movement of the waters is nearly perfectly silent. Along the dark and wide road glides a ship like a monstrous bird in fiery feathers; it is followed by a soft murmur, like the trembling of heavy wings. A spark of light swims under the pastured coast, a sharp red ray, and stretches from it: it is a fisherman towing, but it seems as though one of the homeless stars had descended from the sky onto the river and flutters over the water like a flower of fire. All that has been read in books develops into queer and fanciful ideas, the imagination indefatigably weaves pictures of unrivalled beauty and one feels as though one was swimming in the soft air of the night together with the river. . . . Isot usually joins me; in the night he seems still larger and still more lovable.

"Here you are again?" he says, and, sitting down at my side, remains silent for a long time, concentratedly watching the river and the sky and stroking the fine silk of his golden beard.

"I'll learn all there is to learn, read all there is to read—and will go then along all the rivers and everything will be clear to me. . . . And I'll teach other people—yes, I will. It is so good, my lad, to be able to share one's soul with a man! Even the women, some of them, if you speak to them soul to soul, they understand. Some time ago one of them, sitting in my boat, asks me:

" 'And what shall happen to us when we die? I

don't believe,' says she, 'either in hell or in heaven.' D'you hear? They, my boy, they too are . . ."

Failing to find the right word, he remained silent for a moment and added finally "living souls."

Isot was a man of the night. He was wonderfully awake to all beauty, and expressed it in a wonderful way, with the words of a dreaming child. He believed fearlessly in God, in the church-like notion of Him and he imagined Him as a big, fine-looking old man, a kind and clever master of the world, who cannot conquer all evil only because—

"He's got no time for it; there's too many men come about! But never mind; he'll manage it all right, you'll see. But Christ, Him I cannot understand at all. What am I to do with Him? There's God—well, what more do I want? And here's another one, if you please. The Son, so they say. What of that, that he's the Son? God's not yet dead, is he?"

But oftener Isot sits in perfect silence, thinking of something, and only from time to time murmurs, sighing:

"Yes, that's how it is. . . ."

"What?"

"That is about myself. . . ."

And sighs again, looking into the dim space.

"How splendid life is!"

I agree with him.

"Yes, it is splendid."

The velvet stream of dark water moves powerfully along. Over it stretches itself in a curve the silvery line, the Milky Way; the big stars sparkle like golden larks, and the heart gently sings its unreasonable thoughts on the mysteries of life. Far away beyond

the pastures rays of sun break out from the reddish clouds and—here it comes, spreading its peacock's tail on the skies.

"What a wonderful thing, the sun!" mutters Isot, smiling happily.

IV

I HAD long ago experienced the necessity of knowing how the world in which I live came to be, and what was my perception of it? This natural and, after all, fairly modest desire grew little by little into an unsurmountable obsession and with all the energy of youth I started to burden my friends with "childish" questions. Some of them honestly could not understand me and offered books by Lowell and Lubbock; others cruelly made fun of me and found that I had set my mind on "nonsense." Somebody gave me George Henry Lewes' "History of Philosophy." I thought it very dull and hard to read, and laid it aside.

About this time there appeared among my friends a strange-looking student who went about in an overcoat very much the worse for wear and in a short blue shirt which he often had to pull down at the back in order to conceal the somewhat defective condition of his trousers. He was short-sighted and wore an eyeglass, his beard was parted in the middle and his hair, cut in the "nihilist" fashion, was reddish and long and wonderfully thick and fell down to his shoulders in straight, hard lines. Something in his face reminded me of an ikon of Jesus Christ. He moved about slowly, unwillingly, as though under a spell; when questions were put to him, he answered them shortly, half-sullenly, half-mockingly. I noticed that he, himself, spoke in questions (interrogatively), like Socrates. People did not like him and avoided him.

I had made his acquaintance and, although he was about four years older than I, we very soon became great friends. His name was Nikolai Saccharovitch Vassiljef, and he was studying chemistry.

He was a splendid fellow, intelligent and with a perfect erudition, but, like most gifted Russian people, he was eccentric; for instance, he would eat pieces of rye-bread, spreading a thick layer of quinine on them and, smacking his lips, try to convince me that quinine was the best of dainties. Also that it was wholesome, that it quelled the impetus of the "racial instinct." He used to try on his own skin experiments which were far from being harmless; one day he swallowed a dose of "kali bromati" and smoked opium on top of it, which nearly caused him to die in terrible agony; another time he took a solution of some metallic acid, which also nearly finished him. The doctor, a surly old man, who was sent for to assist him, examined the remains of the solution and said:

"A horse would have died of this. Perhaps even a couple of horses. You will have to pay for this, too, you may be sure." These experiments destroyed his teeth: they became green and gradually fell out. He ended by poisoning himself—I do not know whether it was intentionally or by mistake—in 1901 in Kiev as he worked in the capacity of assistant doctor to Professor Konovalov, investigating indigoids.

But in the years 1889-1890 he was a strong man, of broad build, capable of the best kind of queer humour when he was alone with me, although malicious in the presence of others. We had at that time undertaken to do some accounts for the local board of the Zemstvo—work that brought us one rouble a day. I

can remember Nikolai sitting with his head bent over his desk, singing away in a small, intentionally-vulgar tenor voice, to the tune of the French song: "*Regarde par ci, regarde par là.*"

"Twice forty-four
And twenty-two—
One hundred ten,
One hundred ten."

He sang like that for ten minutes, half an hour, and went on again, his tenor voice sounding more abominable than ever. At last, at the end of my patience, I used to appeal to him: "Stop that noise."

He would throw a glance at the clock—and, approvingly:

"You have a fairly good nervous system. Not every one would be able to stand this kind of torture for more than forty-seven minutes. One day I sang the 'Hallelujah' to a medical friend of mine, but he flung a brass ash-tray at my head at the end of the thirteenth minute. And he was presumptuous enough to study psychiatry!"

He was continually reading German philosophers and intended to write an essay on Hegel and Swedenborg. His perception of the "phenomenology of the spirit" was a humorous one: lying on the sofa which we called the "Caucasian mountain ridge," he used to clap the book to his breast, swing his legs in the air and cry with laughter.

When I asked him what he was laughing about he answered, regretfully:

"My dear fellow, I don't know how to explain it to you—it is too subtile. You will not understand.

But it really is great fun, you know." And when I insisted on his explaining, he would begin to speak to me endlessly and enthusiastically of the "mysticism of reason" of which I actually understood very little and I grieved over this very much.

Of his own studies of philosophy he used to say: "This, old man, is just as interesting as chewing sunflower seeds and just about as profitable."

When he came back from Moscow for the holidays, I came to him, of course, with all my questions and he rejoiced over them very much.

"Ah! philosophy needed? Splendid! I like that. You can get all the spiritual food you need from me." He offered to give me several lectures on this subject.

"It will make it easier for you and I hope you will find it more pleasant than struggling over Lewes."

A few days after this conversation, I was sitting, late in the evening, in a half-demolished summer-house of a desolate and neglected garden. The apple and cherry trees were covered with thick lichen (herpes), bushes of raspberries, red currants and gooseberries grew in disorder, spreading their rampant branches on the paths where Nikolai's father, an official of the ecclesiastic consistory, attired in a grey dressing-gown roamed aimlessly, grumbling and coughing from time to time. His mind had become feeble with old age.

Large sheds rose from all sides and surrounded the place like one huge wall, so that the garden seemed to be situated at the bottom of a square black hole, and as the night approached, the hole became deeper. The air was oppressive; a heavy smell of refuse, warmed by the hot sun of June, came from the yard.

"Let us philosophise," said Nikolai, smacking his

lips with enjoyment over every word. He was sitting in a corner of the summer-house, leaning over a table dug into the ground. The light of his cigarette illuminated in flashes his queer face and its reflection played in the eyeglasses. Nikolai was feverish; he felt chilly and muffled himself up in his thin old coat, scraping the earthen floor with his feet and making the table creak angrily under his weight.

I was listening intensely to the slightly lowered voice of my friend; he explained to me very clearly and fascinatingly the system of Democritus, told me all about the theory of the atom and how it is accepted by science, then, suddenly: "Wait a bit," he said, and remained silent for a long time, smoking one cigarette after another.

The night had come, a moonless night, the sky over the garden was black, the air still more oppressive. And in the house next door, where lived the psychiatrist Kashchenko, a violin was singing softly, while from the open garret window one could hear an old man coughing.

"You see, my dear fellow," went on Nikolai, smoking hard and lowering his voice still a little, "you must think these matters over very carefully. Someone—I have forgotten exactly who it was—said once, and very justly too, that the convictions of educated men are just as conservative as the habits of thought that belong to the illiterate and superstitious people. This is a heresy—but there is a sad truth buried in it. And, to my opinion, it is only too mildly expressed. Think this over well and always remember it."

I remember very well these words, which form what I think was the best, the truest advice ever given to

me. They somehow shattered me, their sound rung loudly in the depths of my soul and my attention became still more concentrated.

"I would not care for you to become anything else than what you are now to the end of your days. Always remember this, what I know you feel already: that freedom of thought is the only and most precious freedom given to man. And only he really has it who never accepts anything on faith—without investigating it. Only he who has completely grasped the continuity of life's development, its uninterrupted movement, the infinite shifting of reality."

He got up from his chair, walked round the table and sat down by my side. "All that I have told you can be said in a very few words: live with your own brains. That's all. I do not want to fill your head with my opinions. Altogether I do not want to teach anyone anything besides mathematics. And most specially so—not you, do you understand? I am only telling you all about it. And I think it is disgusting to try and make anyone resemble oneself. I, particularly, do not want you to think the same way as I do; this would be no good at all, for, my dear old fellow, I think badly."

He threw his cigarette onto the ground and trampled on it heavily with his foot. And immediately lighting another one and warming the nail of his thumb in the light of the match, he went on, smiling sadly:

"You see, I think that humanity will continue unto the very end to describe facts and draw from these descriptions more or less fortunate conjectures as to the essence of truth, or else, leaving the facts uncon-

sidered, it will go on creating visions. Apart from this, above this, there is God, but God is something which I do not accept. It is possible that He exists—but I do not want Him. You see how badly I think? Yes, old man . . . There are people who consider that idealism and materialism are equal errors of the reason. They are like devils who have had enough of hell but who fear the dull harmony of paradise." He sighed and sat listening to the song of the violin.

"Clever people say that we know only that which we think concerning something that we see. But we do not know whether that which we think and how we think of it is right. And you—you must not believe in this, either. Look out for yourself. . . ."

I was deeply moved by his words, in which I understood enough to feel the pain buried in his soul. We shook hands and stood some time like that in silence. That moment was a very good one. Probably one of the happiest I have gone through in all my life—and that life has been such a varied one that it could have afforded to give me more of them. However, human nature is greedy—that is one of its merits, although owing to some misunderstanding, or more so to a certain hypocrisy, it is considered a vice.

We got out on the street and stopped at the gate, listening to the distant thunder. Flashes of lightning glided on the black sky, while in the east the clouds were already in flames and smelted in the fires of the dawn.

"Thank you, Nikolai."

"Rubbish!"

I turned to go away.

"Look here"—Nikolai's voice rang out gaily and

distinctly—"there is a Netshaeff man, Orloff, who lives in Moscow! A splendid old man. He is known to say: 'The truth is that which your perception of it is.' You think of this. Well, good-bye. See you to-morrow."

I walked a few paces away and looked round. Nikolai was leaning against the lamp-post, looking at the sky, eastwards. Blue ringlets of smoke rose above his masses of hair. I left him feeling myself in a state of lyrical enthusiasm. Now, at last, the "gates of great mysteries" lay open in front of me.

But on the next day Nikolai gave me a terrifying picture of the world as it lived in the mind of Empedocles. That queer world had, I think, something particularly fascinating for my lector, for he described it to me enthusiastically, with great clearness, and smacked his lips with relish oftener than was his wont.

It was late in the evening, just about the same hour as the day before, and it had rained hard the whole time; the trees were damp and between them shadows roamed and the wind sighed.

In this chaos of gloomy disconnection, in the dumb whirlwind of bodies torn and scattered, move triumphantly, in mutual antagonism, Hate and Love, so alike that they cannot be distinguished the one from the other. A bluish phantom-like radiance shines around them, reminding one of the winter sky on a sunny day, and throws a light, deathly in its monotony, on all the moving figures. I could not listen to Nikolai, engrossed as I was in the contemplation of this vision, feeling as if I, too, was moving along slowly in this terrific world, torn to pieces, blown up from inside and falling in a winding line, into a

cold blue radiance. I was so overwhelmed by what I had seen that, being in a state of torpor, I could not bring myself to answer Nikolai's questions.

"Are you asleep? You do not listen."

"I cannot."

"Why?"

I explained to him.

"My dear fellow, your imagination is far too unbridled," he told me, lighting a cigarette. "This must not be encouraged. Shall we go for a walk?"

We went to the "Slope," along the street where pools of water shone here and there. Our shadows crawled hastily on the roofs of the houses and on the road. Nikolai was saying that one ought to whitewash the rags in paper factories with chloral natrium—that this would make it better and cheaper. He also told me of the work of some professor who was trying to discover how to lengthen the wood-fibre. But my eyes still watched the floating hands and saw somebody's sad eyes.

The next day a telegram summoned Nikolai back to Moscow to the University and he went away, urging me to leave off philosophy until his return.

I remained behind with my head full of troubled thoughts and a disturbed soul, and after several days had gone by I began to feel that my brains were smelting and boiling and giving birth to the queerest of thoughts, to phantom-like visions and pictures. I was filled with a sensation of anguish which sapped all my vitality and I began to fear for my reason. But I was brave, and decided to reach to the limit of my fear—which was probably the thing that saved me. I went through terrible nights, full of anxiety. Sit-

ting sometimes on the "Slope," watching the dim outlines of the pastures beyond the Volga and the sky, strewn with a golden rain of stars, I used to wait for the moment when suddenly, in the blue darkness of the sky, there should appear a huge round stain like the opening of a fathomless well; a flaming finger would thrust itself out of it and threaten me.

I also saw God—the Almighty—exactly as he is represented on ikons and pictures, with a pleasant grey-bearded face and indifferent eyes. He sits, all alone, on a big, heavy throne and sews with a golden needle and a blue thread a hideously long white shirt, which falls down to the earth as a diaphanous cloud. Around Him there is a void and you cannot watch it without terror, for it gets broader and deeper continually. Behind the river, up to the sky, on the dark outlines beyond, rises a human ear, just an ordinary ear, with coarse hair in the ear-shell. There it comes —and listens to all that I am thinking about. I killed innumerable quantities of people with a long double-edged sword as supple as a whip, belonging to some executioner of the Middle Ages. Men and women came to me from right and left, and approached silently, with bent heads, humbly stretching out their necks. An unknown creature stood behind me and it was at his will that I killed them all, while he breathed cold needles into my brain.

A naked woman used to come up to me. She had the claws of a bird, instead of human feet; golden rays shone out of her breasts. She came up and poured handfuls of burning oil on my head and, suddenly blazing up like a tuft of wadding, I disappeared.

The night-watch Ibrahim Gubaidullin picked me

up several times on the upper path of the "Slope" and brought me home, tenderly persuading me in his Armenian brogue:

"If you ill, why go out? A man ill must lie in bed at home."

Sometimes, worn out by my delirious visions, I used to run down to the river and bathe—this refreshed me a little. At home I was awaited by two trained mice, who lived behind the wooden border of the wall; they had nibbled a hole through it at the level of the table and crawled straight onto the cloth as soon as they heard me busying myself with the supper which my landlady used to set for me at night.

And this is what I saw there: the funny little animals would grow into small devils and, sitting on the tobacco-box, swinging their hairy legs, observed me in a dignified manner, while a dull voice—I did not know whose it was—whispered to me as softly as the fall of rain to the ground:

"Devils are to be divided into different categories, but they have a mutual aim in helping people to seek for miseries."

"This is a lie," I would cry out, angrily. "No one looks out for miseries."

And then came No One. I heard him fidget with the bolt of the gate, open the front door, the entrance, and—there he was, right inside my room. He is as round as a soap-bubble, he has no hands, and the dial-plate of the clock serves as a face to him, the fingers on the dial being carrots—for the latter I have an idiosyncrasy from my childhood. I know that this is the husband of the woman I love—only he has changed his dress in order that I should not know

him. I can see him turn into a real person—a fat little man with a small flaxen beard and a soft expression in his eyes; he smiles at me and tells me all the things that I think of his wife, hard and unflattering things which can be known to no one except myself.

"Get out!" I cry to him.

Then I hear a knock at the wall behind my back—it is my kind and clever landlady, Felicata Tikhomilowna. Her knocking brings me back to the world of realities. I pour some cold water over my head, and so as not to bang doors and disturb the sleepers I crawl through the window into the garden, where I remain until the morning.

In the morning, at breakfast, my landlady says:

"You cried out again in your sleep to-night. . . ."

I feel unutterably ashamed of myself; I despise myself.

. . . At that time I was working as clerk to the advocate A. I. Lanin, a splendid man, to whom I feel greatly indebted in every way. One day as I came to the office, I met him furiously brandishing some papers and shouting:

"Are you mad? My dear sir, look what you have written in the official appeal! Please copy it all over again, as the term runs out to-day. If it is a joke, it is a poor one, I may tell you."

I took the complaint and found these verses written out very distinctly in the text:

"The right lasts eternally,
The pain of my soul is great,
If only I could pray fervently,
If only I knew the happiness of faith."

These verses were just as much of a surprise for me as they were for my boss. I stared at them and could hardly believe that I was their author.

In the evening, as we were working, A. I. came up to me and said:

"You must forgive me for having scolded you. But I was so surprised, don't you see? . . . What is the matter with you? You are looking very upset lately and you have grown thin."

"I suffer from insomnia," I answered.

"Well, there is a cure for that."

Yes, something had to be done about it. An end had to be put to those visions and nocturnal conversations with different people who came unseen and went away mysteriously as soon as the consciousness of reality returned to me; an end to this far too exciting life on the very verge of madness.

I had already reached the stage when I waited anxiously for wonderful things to happen even in broad daylight.

If one of the houses in town had suddenly jumped over my head I certainly would not have been greatly startled. There seemed to me to be no reason why the drayman's horse should not rise on its hind legs and announce in a deep bass voice:

"Anathema—"

Or sometimes I would see a woman in a straw hat and yellow gloves sitting on a bench of the promenade along the Kremlin wall. If I come up to her and say, "There is no God," she will throw an astonished glance at me and exclaim, deeply hurt:

"What do you mean? And what about me?" And immediately transformed into a winged creature,

she would fly away, the whole earth would grow with large trees without leaves, greasy blue slime would drop from their branches, and I, as a criminal, would be sentenced to remain a frog for twenty-three years and to ring the great resounding bell of the Veskesensky Church day and night. I feel an invincible desire to tell the lady that there is no God, but, knowing well what the consequences of my sincerity would be, I slip away quietly as fast as I can.

Everything is possible. It is also possible that nothing exists in reality; therefore I must touch every fence, wall and tree in order to convince myself that it exists. This gives me a certain confidence. If you keep striking your fist on something hard you actually know that it is there.

The earth is very malicious. You walk on her with assurance, just as the others do, and all of a sudden her consistency disappears under your feet; she becomes as penetrable as air, but remains dark, and your soul rushes headlong into this darkness for a time which seems an eternity, though it lasts only a few seconds.

The sky is also not to be relied upon; it can at any moment change its dome-like shape to the shape of a pyramid turned downward, whose edge will then recline on my skull and I will have to remain immovably on one spot until the moment comes when the iron stars, which hold the sky together, will be corroded by rust; then all will crumble into reddish dust and I will be buried under it. Everything is possible. It is only impossible to live in a world of such possibilities.

My soul was in great pain. And had I not con-

vinced myself two years ago through personal experience of the baseness and stupidity of suicide I would have surely applied that method for curing myself.

The psychiatrist, a small, dark, hunch-backed man, who lived alone and had an intelligent and sceptical mind, questioned me a long time concerning the life I lead, then slapping his strangely white hand on my knee he said:

"First of all, my dear man, you've got to send all your books to the devil, as well as all the other rubbish among which you live. You have got a strong constitution and it is a shame to let yourself get into such a condition. You need physical exertion. How about women? Oh, this is no good at all. Leave abstinence to others and find a little girl who will play the game well; that will do you good." He gave me more advice equally unpleasant and repulsive to me, wrote out two prescriptions and ended with a few sentences which I can recall perfectly.

"I have heard some things about you, and please forgive me if you do not like what I am going to say, I think you must be a so-called primitive man.

"And with such people imagination usually dominates logical reflection. All that you have read, all that you have seen, only served to rouse your imagination, and the latter is impossible to reconcile with reality, which is also phantastical, but in its own way." And also then: "Some ancient sage has said: 'Who likes to contradict is not capable of doing anything thoroughly.'

"This is well said. First of all, get thoroughly to the end of a thing, then contradict it. That is right."

And as he saw me out he added with the smile of a gay old devil:

"Don't forget about the little girl."

A few days after this I left Nijni to go to the Simbirsk colony of Tolstoists, and, on arriving there, learnt from the peasants the tragi-comic story of its destruction.

V

I AM a night-guard at the Station Dobrinka. From six o'clock at night until six in the morning I walk about round the warehouses with a cudgel in my hand; the wind howls out of thousands of mouths from the steppes, driving with it huge clouds of snow, and out of their grey thickness emerge locomotives slowly gliding backwards and forwards, sighing heavily, dragging behind them the black links of trains. It is as though someone was leisurely entangling the whole earth with an unbroken chain and dragging it through the skies that are crumbled into a cold white dust. The screeching of iron, the jingling of the links, the strange creaking, the soft howling—all that is floating about together with the snow. At the warehouse in the line, in the dim whirlwinds of snow, two black figures are moving about. Those are Cossacks, who have come to steal flour. Catching sight of me, they jump aside and hide in the snow heap; but a few moments later, through the wail and rustling of the snow-storm, I can hear their beggarly complaints and beseechings, their promises to give me money, also swearing.

"Leave that off, fellows," I tell them.

It bores me to listen to them. I do not want to talk to them, for I know that they are not poor men, that it is not need that drives them to steal, but that they are doing it for trade, for drink and for women.

Sometimes they send the pretty grass-widow, the wife of a Petersburg Cossack, Lioska Grafova, to try and soften my heart towards them. She unbuttons her jacket and blouse and exhibits her bosom to the guards; her breasts are elastic like gristle and stand in a horizontal line.

"Look at them, like cannons they are," she boasts of them provokingly. "Well, let us put it at one sack of wheat, second rate? Settled? No? Well, then, third?"

The young lad from Tambov, the religious-minded Baikoff, bargains with her in a business-like way, also the Tartar from Usman, the crippled Ibrahim.

She stands in front of them, her chest uncovered, the snow melting away on her skin. Then, shrugging her shoulders, she swears at them: "Make up your minds, you damned katzaps,[1] you skunks! You confounded filthy tripe, wherever shall you find such a sweet as I am, you dog's carrion!"

She despises Russian peasants. She has a deep, strong voice and her handsome face is lighted by a pair of insolent cat's eyes. Ibrahim leads her under the roof of the warehouse while her friends, throwing the empty sacks on the sleigh, depart.

The shamelessness of that woman is repulsive to me, and I pity so intensely her beautiful healthy body. Ibrahim used to call Lioska the bitch and spat in disgust remembering her embraces, while Baikoff softly and thoughtfully muttered:

"One ought to kill such as she. . . ."

On feast days, particularly dressed, with creaking goat-leather boots and a crimson handkerchief tied

[1] Name which Little Russians use for Big Russians.

round her thick chestnut-coloured hair, she goes to the town, and there offers her body to the "intelligentsia," treating all the customers with equal insolence and contempt. When she turned to me, trying to bring me under her spell, I drove her away from my quarters, but on one warm moonlight night I fell asleep sitting on the stairs of the warehouse and as I opened my eyes I found Lioska standing in front of me.

She stood, her hands stuck in the pockets of her overcoat, knitting her brows, her stately figure well illuminated by the moon.

"Don't be afraid; I've not come to steal. I'm just walking about. . . ."

Judging by the stars, it was long past midnight.

"It's rather late for a walk, isn't it?"

"A woman lives in the night," replied Lioska, sitting down at my side. "And you, what are you sleeping for? Is it that what you're paid for?"

She got a handful of sun-flower seeds out of her pocket and, munching them, she asked:

"You can read, they say. Tell me, where's the town Obolak?"

"I don't know."

"The Virgin Mary has appeared there; she is painted on images with her hands lifted up in the air and the Child lying in her lap. . . ."

"Ahalatzk."

"Where is it?"

"Somewhere in the Ural, or in Siberia."

She passed her tongue over her lips and said: "What if I was to go there? . . . It's so far, though. But I suppose I must."

"What for?"

"To pray. I'm such a sinner. All on account of you males. Have you got a smoke?"

She lighted a cigarette, warning me:

"Don't you tell the Cossacks about it; they don't like it when a woman puffs smoke." Her face, flushed by the winter breeze, was very beautiful; the dark pupils of her eyes shone dazzlingly in the opaline ovals round the eyeballs.

A golden ray flashed in the sky; the woman made the sign of the cross, saying:

"God rest his soul! My soul'll fall also like this one day. When is it that you're more lonely—on light nights or in the dark ones? I feel especially lonely in the light ones." She spat on her cigarette and, throwing it to the ground and yawning broadly, proposed to me: "Shall we have some fun?"

And as I refused, she added indifferently:

"People enjoy me . . . they all say so. . . ."

I spoke to her gently and tenderly of her repulsive shamelessness. Without looking at me she answered in calm, even tones:

"It's from being bored that I lost my shame. I'm bored, man. . . ."

It was strange for me to hear the word "man" coming from her lips; it sounded somehow different, unusual. And the woman, throwing her head back and watching the sky, went on, slowly:

"I am not to blame; it's said with some reason that it's by God's will that a woman's rated by her legs. I can't be blamed for that. . . ." She sat silently for a while, then got up and looked about.

"I'll go to the station-master."

And she slowly followed the railway lines, strewn

with silver by the moon, while I remained sitting, crushed by the words:

"I'm bored, man. . . ."

I could not understand at that time the "boredom" of people whose life begins and continues in wide spaces, in an emptiness, brightly illuminated by the sun or by the moon, in large plains, when a man can see clearly his smallness and nullity, where there is very nearly nothing that should strengthen his will and desire to live.

People glided past in front of me who were strangers to all that I thought and did; every one of them thrust his reflection into my soul, and in the incessant shifting of these reflections I felt myself doomed to the torture of understanding the non-understandable. Here I can see before me in a fierce whirlwind Afrikan Petrovsky, the station-master, a broad-shouldered, long-armed athlete; he has the bulging dark eyes of a lobster, a huge black beard and is all covered with hairs like a wild beast, but speaks, strangely enough, in a high tenor voice and, getting angry, whizzes through his nose, swelling his large Kalmuk nostrils. He is a thief—orders the weighers to break open the vans bringing cargo from the Caspian Sea. The weighers bring him silks and candies; he sells the stolen goods and arranges at nights in his flat "Monastic pleasures." He is a cruel man, knocks about mercilessly the station guards, and it is said that he thrashed his wife to death. Outside office hours he arrays himself in a crimson silk shirt, black velvet trousers, his feet are shod in high Tartar boots out of green Morocco leather, and on his black head of curly hair he wears a lilac Tartar cap embroidered with

gold. Thus disguised, he resembles a public-house singer dressed as a "boyar."

He is often visited by the assistant of the rural police inspector, Masloff, a bald-headed, clean shaven man who looks like a priest, has the sharp nose of a bird of prey and small foxy eyes. His nickname is "the actress." Often the soap-boiler, Tikhon Stepakhin, comes to see him, a red-haired, fine looking peasant as heavy as an ox, always sleepy. The workmen in his factory continually get poisoned with something and are putrified alive; he has been judged and sentenced several times for damages caused to them. Another visitor is the deacon Voroshiloff, a drunken, filthy, slovenly little man who plays to perfection the guitar and the accordion and has a pock-marked face with high cheek bones framed in grey hairs, thick like the quills of a hedgehog. His hands are well cared for, like a woman's, and his beautiful bright blue eyes are called: "The stolen eyes."

Usually they are all joined by girls from the farms and the women from the Cossack villages; sometimes Lioska comes with them, too. In a small room, crowded with sofas, they all sit down to a heavy round table arrayed with smoked fowl, hams, conserves, baked apples, watermelons and sour cabbage. Among all these splendours is a large "quarter" of vodka. Petrovsky and his friends chew, munch, suck the vodka out of a silver "brotherly" jar which contains a quarter of the bottle—all that in silence. They have saturated themselves. Stepakhin is belching like a Bashkir, crossing himself continually; the deacon, with a tender smile on his lips, is tuning the guitar. Then they pass into another large room, where there is no

furniture except half a dozen chairs, and begin to sing.

They sing beautifully. Petrovsky has a tenor, Stepakhin a deep, soft bass, the deacon has a fine baritone. Masloff cleverly accompanies the master of the house. The women, too, all have fine voices. Especially prominent by the pureness of its sound is the contralto of the Cossack's wife Kubassova. Lioska's voice is shrill; the deacon often lifts at her a threatening finger. They sing piously, as though they were singing in church, and all look sternly at each other; only Stepakhin, standing with wide-spread legs, has bent down his head and his face wears a look of amazement, as though he hardly believes himself that the endless velvety stream of the sound is actually issuing from his own throat. The songs are painfully sad; sometimes they choose some church-song and sing it solemnly; often it is: "Open the gates of repentance."

The whites of Petrovsky's lobster-eyes are blood-shot and he straightens out his whole body like a soldier in line and shouts:

"Deacon—dance! Tikhon, come on! Some life, boys!"

"Here we are!" replies the deacon readily, brandishing the guitar and craftily running his fingers on the strings; with the agility of a conjurer, he starts playing a "trepak." [1] Stepakhin is dancing. The wooden face of the soap-boiler is lit by a dreamy smile, his heavy body suddenly displays a supple, feline grace, he glides swiftly about the room like a sheatfish in a dim pool,

[1] Russian national dance.

all his limbs in beautiful, rhythmical convulsions and noiselessly shuffling his feet, making ingenuous figures, watches the people around him with the look of a happy mortal. He dances in a fascinating way, and although the Cossack's wife Kubassova, with shrill cries, saunters around him temptingly and gracefully, Stepakhin puts her into the shade by the wonderful beauty of the movements of his powerful body. This dancing intoxicates every one. Afrikan Petrovsky is raging from joy; he yells, whistles, flourishes his head, shaking the tears away from his eyes. The deacon, stopping to play, embraces Stepakhin, kisses him and, stifling with emotion, mutters:

"Tikhon . . . this is divine . . . this is like church. . . . Dear fellow, all, all will be forgiven to you! . . ."

And Masloff turns around them and shouts:

"Tikhon! You're a tsar! A genius! A murderer!"

Those people have drunk a "quarter" of vodka, but it is only now that they become tipsy and it seems to me that this intoxication is caused by joy, by mutual affection and praises. The women are tipsy, too; their eyes glisten greedily, their cheeks are flushed, they fan themselves with hankerchiefs and are excited like horses kept too long without movement and who have been led out of some dark stables into a wide yard, into the light of a warm spring day.

Lioska, her mouth half-closed, watches Stepakhin with angry, moistened eyes, and, rocking to and fro on her chair, scrapes the floor with the soles of her shoes.

Outside the wind whistles and howls and drones in

the chimney, white wings rustle against the window-panes. Stepakhin, wiping the sweat of his face with a handkerchief, says gently and guiltily:

"Thanks to the dancers, good people have no respect for me. . . ."

Petrovsky fiercely gives the good people a wonderful variety of bad names, and the women cry out affectedly, trying to prove that they are ashamed. But the combinations of the licentious words triumphantly display the beautiful flexibility of the Russian language.

Again the deacon plays, and now it is Petrovsky's turn to dance. With a fierce audacity he turns about with crashes and thuds and shrill cries as though tearing and breaking to pieces something that stands in his way. Lioska is dancing too, and, like a man possessed, Masloff also clumsily jumps about. The room is filled with a trample of feet, whistles and yelping, a continual flashing of women's skirts, and among all this, hammering away the tempo with his heels, Petrovsky shouts violently, vengefully: "Heigho! I'm a ruined man." One can hear how he scrapes his teeth together. In this frenetic gaiety, there is no merriment, no light-winged joy that lifts a man over the earth—it is very nearly a state of religious enthusiasm, and reminds one of the meetings of the "khlisti"; of the dances of the dervish, in the Transcaucasus. In this whirlwind of bodies—there is a crushing strength and its everlasting restlessness seems to me very near despair. All these men are gifted in their own way, I should say weirdly gifted; they intoxicate each other by a common ecstatic love for the song, the dance, the female body, for the triumphant

beauty of movement and sound. All that they do resembles a divine service of the savages. Petrovsky relieves me of my duty, to enable me to take part in the "Monastic life," because I know many good songs, can declaim them rather well and also manage to swallow, without getting drunk, a quantity of vodka, which I do not care about. "Peshkov, fire away!" he shouts—he shouts even when he kisses a woman; to growl like a beast—is a necessity for him.

I lean against the wall and "fire away." Choosing intentionally touching and beautiful songs, I declaim them, trying to draw away the cover from the beauty of the words and the emotion which is hidden in them. And I submit to their ineffable sadness, which is close to my soul, although hostily denied by reason.

"Dear God!" clamours the deacon, pressing his head between his hands, his small and tender palms disappearing completely in the masses of grey hairs. Stepakhin looks at me in amazement and I think with a certain envy; his face twitches unpleasantly. Petrovsky has clasped his teeth together so firmly that his cheek bones swell up like bumps. And Masloff, having placed Kubassova on his knees, has forgotten all about her and stares at the ground like a sick dog.

I cannot understand what it is I want from these people, but sometimes it seems to me that if one should succeed in saturating their souls with songs to the brim they would somehow become different and more close to myself. Here they are, embracing me rapturously, admiring and kissing me.

"You rascal," says Masloff to me, stroking my hand. Stepakhin kisses me in silence.

"Have a drink, the end'll be the same, whatever

you do!" roars Petrovsky, while Lioska, flinging up her hands, says:

"I'm in love with him—I say it openly, that I'm in love—even my feet shake from it. . . ." And in a moment, insatiable, they demand more and more.

Behind the windows, in the darkness torn by the lights of the station, the heavy, red-eyed serpents of trains crawl in an iron rumble, the globe-shaped figures of conductors and engine-oilers roam, shaking about their hanging lanterns. The window-panes are blown over with smoke and steam and when the engines whistle, the window-panes answer with a soft, plaintive sound. There, in the night, life follows its hard trail, not connected in any way with the fierce, ecstatic worship of beauty continued in that room.

I know they are worthless people—but they worship beauty with a religious tremor, they serve it with self-denial, they get drunk with its poison and are capable of killing themselves for its sake.

Out of these contradictions rises a cloud of misty longing, that smothers me, while the ecstasy of their raptures reaches its highest point. But all the songs have been sung, all the dances have been already danced.

"Undress the women," shouts Petrovsky. It was Stepakhin who did the undressing; he never hurried over it, carefully untying the strings, unfastening the hooks, and in a business-like way folding together in a corner the blouses, the skirts and shirts.

They walked round the women, sighing with amazement, and praised their bodies just as rapturously as a moment ago they had praised the song and the dance. Then again they went to the table in the

smaller room, and ate and drank—and after that began an indescribable, unspeakable night-mare. The animal strength of those men did not surprise me, but it filled me with awe to watch their somewhat hostile treatment of the women, the beauty of whom they had religiously worshiped a moment ago. In their sensuality I felt a mixture of refined vengeance and it seemed that this vengeance was born of despair, of the incapacity to empty themselves, to relieve themselves of something that disfigured and oppressed them.

I remember the cry of Stepakhin that startled me so intensely: he caught sight of the reflection of his face in the glass: his red face had become purple, fawn-coloured, his eyes were abnormally protruding, he muttered: "Fellows, look here, my God!" and roared:

"My face is not a human one, look! It's not a human one, fellows!"

He seized a bottle and flung it at the glass. "There, get it, you devil's snout, here you are." He was not drunk, although he had had a lot to drink, and when the deacon tried to appease him, he said very reasonably:

"Get away, deacon. . . . I know—what can I expect? I don't live a human life. Am I a man? Instead of a soul I've got a hairy devil in me; now, get away. . . . There's nothing to do done! . . ."

Something dark and terrible lived and tossed about in every one of them. The women yelped from the pain but accepted their cruelty as something inevitable, even pleasant, and Lioska intentionally provoked Petrovsky by her cries:

"Now, go on, again, once more. Pinch hard, now,

now . . ." The cat-like pupils of her eyes grew larger and larger and in those moments there was something in her that resembled the martyrs in pictures—I was afraid that Petrovsky would kill her.

Once, at dawn, walking away with her from the station-master's, I asked her why she allowed them to ill-treat and torture her. "But it's himself that is tortured. They're all like that. The deacon, for instance, himself cries over it."

"Why is that?"

"The deacon? Because he is old, his strength gives way. And the others, Afrikan and Stepakhin—you will not understand for why. . . . And I know, but don't find the words to explain it. I know altogether a lot, but don't find the words, while I gather my words—the thoughts run away—and when the thoughts are there—the words fail."

She actually must have understood something in those raging powers; I can well recall how bitterly she cried, on a spring night, saying:

"I pity you so, you don't know how I pity you. . . . You'll be done with, here, like a bird in a fire, in the smoke. Oh, how I pity you all . . ." And with the tender words of a mother, with the fearless wisdom of a person who has looked deep into the darkness of the soul and got frightened of it, she spoke to me a long time of things terrible and shameless.

It seems to me now, that I was assisting at a hard struggle of two principles—those of the beast and of the man: the man strives to satisfy once and for all the animal in himself, free himself from the latter's insatiable desires which grow, however, more and

more, inexorably submitting the man to their power. At that time those violent feasts of the flesh filled me with repulsion and misery, mixed with compassion for the people, especially for the women. But, drowned in grief, I still continued participating in the delirious pleasures of "Monastic life"; to use pompous words, I suffered then from "fanaticism of knowledge," I was captured and led by the fanatic of knowledge himself, that is, Satan.

"You must know all, you must understand all," sternly, hardly opening his mouth, Romass used to say to me, sucking at his pipe, spitting smoke and watching how the blue ringlets got tangled in the grey hairs of his beard.

"It is not right to live without justification—that would mean to live a useless life. So that you must grow used to look into all the clefts and holes, in the idea that there, perhaps, the truth which you seek is hidden. Live fearlessly, without avoiding the terrible and unpleasant. Only that is terrible and unpleasant which you fail to understand. There!"

Therefore I peered everywhere, without sparing myself, and learnt to know a lot that perhaps it would have been better for me not to know, but that is necessary to impart to people, yes, necessary, for it is their life, the hard, filthy drama of the struggle between man and beast, where the man attempts to conquer the elements within and without himself. If there is anything on earth really sacred and great it is the incessant growth of man, valuable even then when he is hateful.

Besides, having penetrated attentively into the

game of life, I lost the capacity of hating, and not because it is hard—hatred is very easily acquired—but because it is useless and even abasing, for, after all, one hates something that belongs to oneself.

Yes, philosophy, and especially the philosophy of morals, is a dull matter, but when the soul is bruised to blood by life and cries bitterly from an inexhaustible love to the "magnificent trifle"—man, it is then forced to philosophise in the hope of finding some consolation.

Having lived three or four months in the Station Dobrinka, I felt that it was more than I could stand, for apart from the ecstatic meetings at Petrovsky's, I began to be despotically persecuted by his cook, Maremiana, a woman of forty-six years and nearly six feet high, having once been weighed in the luggage-house on the balance "Firhauks" she carried a weight of two hundred fifty-three pounds. On her coppery, moon-shaped face, her round green eyes flashed angrily, reminding one of oxygenated copper; under the left eye she had a huge mole, which caused it to frown mistrustfully. She could read, read rapturously the lives of saints and with the whole strength of her enormous heart hated the emperors Diocletian and Decius. "Had I got hold of them, I'd have scratched their eyes out!" she said, viciously. But this fierceness, directed to the deep past, did not prevent her to tremble like a slave before "the actress" Masloff. In the hours of the drunken suppers she served him piously, peering into his false eyes with the look of a happy dog. Sometimes, pretending to be drunk, he lay down on the floor, beating his chest and moaning: "Oh, I'm

feeling bad, I'm dying. . . ." She would snatch him up in her arms in terror, and carry him away like a child into the kitchen.

His name was Martin, but often in her fear of him she mixed his name with that of her master and called him: "Martiken."

Then he would jump up from the floor and squall hideously:

"Wha-at? How did you say?"

She pressed her hands to her stomach, bowed down to the floor before him and begged in a voice, hoarse from terror:

"Forgive me, for God's sake. . . ."

He tried to frighten her still more by a whistling, shrill yelp—then the huge woman stood in silence, guiltily flapping her eyes, out of which sprung out small dim greenish tears. Everybody laughed and Masloff, butting his head into her stomach, said to her gently: "Well, well, that's all right, you scarecrow. . . . Go, now, nursie."

And as she departed, cautiously, he would say, not without pride: "A buffalo she is—but her heart is of a wonderful tenderness. . . ."

At the beginning of our acquaintance Maremiana was also good-natured and kind as a mother towards me, but one day I said something to her, blaming her slavish meekness in regard to "the actress." She sprung away from me, as though I had scalded her with boiling water. The green balls of her eyes became blood-shot, fawn-coloured; she sat down heavily on a bench, stifling in angry indignation, shaking with her whole body, and muttered:

"You little c-cad, what are you thinking of? You

dare to speak like that of him? In such words? I'll . . . he'll . . . you ought to be crumbled to pieces for it! Are you mad? He, more saintly than the saints—and you, what are you?"

And suddenly cried out:

"One ought to poison you, you wolf's soul! Out with you!"

I was abashed by this explosion of amazing fury and in spite of my youth conceived that I had touched brutally there something really sacred or sore. But how could I guess that this heap of flesh and grease, covering up a huge skeleton, carried in her depths something inviolable and dear to her heart? That was the way in which life taught me to grasp the equanimity of people, respect the mysterious that lived in them, and treat them with greater care and consideration.

After this incident, Maremiana began hating me violently, savagely. She laid on my shoulders a quantity of duties attached to the household of the station-master. When relieved of my watch after a sleepless night, I had to go and split wood and take it to the kitchen and the rooms, clean the plate, heat the stoves, look after Petrovsky's horse and a lot more, which occupied nearly a half of my day, leaving me no spare time for reading or sleeping. The woman openly threatened me:

"I'll tyrannise you so that you'll run away to the Caucasus." I remembered Barinoff's sentence: "One wants to get used to the Caucasus," and addressed a petition to the authorities in Borissoglebsk in which I stated Maremiana's tyranny in verse. My petition had some success and I was removed to the luggage

station of Borissoglebsk and charged to guard tarpaulins and sacks and repair them.

There I got acquainted with a wide group of the "intelligentsia." They were nearly all "unreliable," [1] had tasted the prison and the exile, had read a lot, knew different languages—they were expelled students, seminarians, statisticians, a naval officer and two officers of the army.

This group of about sixty men had been gathered in the Volga towns by a certain M. E. Adaduroff, a business man, who had offered to the Board of the Griase-Baritzin railway to put an end to the incredible thieving of goods that occurred there, by the combined efforts of these people. They took this matter up very passionately—revealed the tricks of the station-masters, weighers, conductors and workmen and boasted before one another on the successful chase of thieves. It always seemed to me that they ought to be doing something else, conforming more to their dignity, capacities and history, for at that time I was only vaguely conscious of the fact that it is forbidden in Russia to "sow the wise, the good, the eternal." I walked in the middle between the original town people and the "Kulturtraeger" of a peculiar type and it amused me to see the incompatible differences of these groups. The whole town knew, of course, that the "Adadurovtzi" were "politicians, of those whom one hangs," and watching intently the activities of these men, hated them heartily and feared them. It was unpleasant to notice the evil, cowardly and revengeful glances of the inhabitants; they hated the "Ada-

[1] Name given to suspicious revolutionaries by the government in Russia.

durovtzi" in fear—as their own personal enemies, and in faith as the enemies of the "Tsar and the country."

My friend Pavel Krinkoff, the turner, sitting with me in the bar, drinking beer, deliberated loudly: "How can one allow such people to work! One must send them to deserted islands, make Robinson Crusoes of them! And still better, hang them all! Two years ago they used to hang them all in Petersburg!"

Krinkoff was a thoroughly well-read man, was enthusiastic over geography and Jukovsky's verses, owned about twenty good books and among them the "Case of the First of March." He handed me this book very mysteriously and said:

"There, take this and read what they are like! And take care; if they catch you with it, you're done for!"

He was not the only one who reasoned in that way.

I made the acquaintance of the writer Starostin-Manenkoff—he served in the chancery of the Wares Department of the Griase-Tsaritsin Railway.

He was middle-sized and stout and resembled a *castrato* by his puffy, hairless face and colourless, expressionless eyes; his heavy gait and vague movements enforced this resemblance. His flabby body was a receptacle for innumerable and varied illnesses, and his susceptibility sharpened them still more. He sighed continually, crunched, coughed and spat in all directions—in the empty maccaroni case which served him as waste-paper basket, in flower-pots on the window-sill, in the ash-tray and also right on the floor, near the door. He strained his whole body before spitting, then watched the result and grievously shaking his bald head, said:

"That's bad."

In the evenings, in his small room with fustian curtains and pots of fuchsia and geraniums on the window-sill, an ikon of the martyrs Kirill and Ulita hanging in the corner, he used to sit at the table, crowded with heaps of papers and writings and drink vodka in little sips, eating some onion on the top of it and complained in a squeaking tone:

"Glieb Uspensky ridicules the peasant and I write with the blood of my heart! You who read, tell me: where, in what lies the difference between Uspensky and Leikin? Nevertheless, he is printed in the best reviews, whereas I. . . ."

His stories were published in provincial papers, but once or twice they got into the review "Dielo." Starostin liked to be reminded of this.

I reminded him of it.

"Well, what of that?" he retorted sadly, but not so plaintively. "That's so little, when I. . . ."

He crawled from his chair to the floor, then on all fours under the wide bed and got out from there a large bundle tied up in a grey shawl; then clapping his hand on it, lifted a cloud of dust and cried, smothering from it:

"There, there it is, already! Written with the juice of my heart! Yes, yes, with its blood!"

His face grew purple, his eyes filled with drunken tears. But one day, being sober, he read to me a story he had just written about a peasant who, during a fire, saved the favourite horse of the rural policeman, who an hour before the deed had knocked out two teeth of the heroical peasant for the theft of a polepin. The peasant was badly burnt during his act of

salvation and was sent to the hospital. Starostin read this touching story and cried with joy, muttering rapturously:

"How well this is written, how intimate it is! Yes, yes, my friend. Learn to penetrate to the soul. . . ."

His story I did not like at all, but the joy of the author also nearly drove me to tears. His genuine emotion moved me sincerely.

But why did this unpleasantly laughable man cry? I asked him to give me the manuscript to let me read over at home. No, the story was written with intentional plaintiveness and sweetness like the false petitions of the "miserable sufferers" to the kind and rich widows. But, all the same, what was it that provoked those sincere tears of their author and this childish joy of his? "I don't like your story," I owned to Starostin. Lovingly gathering the pages of the manuscript, he sighed:

"You're coarse, that's what you are! And you have no understanding."

"What is it that touches you in it?"

"The soul," he cried angrily, "the soul shines in it!"

He scolded me to his satisfaction, then drank some vodka and said, impressively: "You must learn! You write verses—that is silly. You mustn't do it. You will not become a Nadson, you're made of different stuff; you have no heart, you're coarse. Remember: Pushkin ruined his unusual talent on verses. Prose is real, sacred literature, honest prose is."

He was to me the incarnation of this sacred prose and its thick smoke smothered me already. He had a mistress, his landlady, a woman with huge breasts and a back part that could not find place in a chair.

On her name-day, Starostin solemnly presented her with a wide straw armchair, that moved her greatly. She kissed her beloved three times on the lips, and said, turning to me: "There, young man, learn from the elder how to make love to a woman." Starostin stood next to me, smiling happily and pulling at his grey ears, soft like a dog's.

It was a bright day at the end of March, fuchsias grew in quantities on the window-sills, the spring murmur of brooks poured into the room, impregnated with the smell of hot pie, soap and tobacco. My youth and ignorance did not prevent me from perceiving with anguish the possibility of vulgar and complicated dramas being concealed in the "sacred, honest prose."

Dreaming of great heroical deeds and the brilliant joys of life, I guarded the tarpaulins and sacks, the logs, sleepers and bucklers from the Cossacks of the neighbouring station. I used to read Shakespeare and Heine and then, suddenly remembering the actuality that was slowly putrifying around me, I would sit or lie for hours doing nothing, incapable of understanding anything, as though stunned by a knock on the head with a stick.

In the town, imbued with smells of grease, soap and rotten meat, the mayor induced the clergy to offer "Te Deums" on the banishment of devils from the well in his yard. The teacher of the town college thrashed his wife on Saturdays in the bath-house; sometimes she succeeded in escaping from him and would run away in the garden, naked and fat, while he rushed after her, with rods in his hands. The neighbours of the teacher used to invite their friends to watch this performance through the clefts of the hedge.

I used to go there too and watch the audience; one day I even fought with one of the loafers and was nearly brought to the police-station for it. A man in the crowd tried to calm me down by saying:

"Now, now, what are you so hot-tempered for? Everyone likes to look at that sort of thing. You won't see that even in Moscow."

The clerk of the railway office at whose house I rented a corner room for one rouble a month, sincerely tried to convince me that all the Jews were not only swindlers but also hermaphrodites. I argued with him and one night, together with his wife and brother, he came up to my bed to certify himself whether I was a Jew or not. I had to sprain his arm and knock out some of his brother's teeth in order to get rid of them.

But although I saw that all these people lived merely in order to eat, and that their favourite, most cherished occupation was to heap up supplies of the most varied food, as though expecting a universal hunger plague—it was they who governed life, they who moulded it filthily and narrowly.

After all that I had seen, the life of the clever and kind "intelligentsia" seemed to me both dull and colourless; it seemed to flow outside that delirious, shadowy bustle that formed the sickly actuality of the unbroken every-day life. The more attentively I watched, the more uneasy and anxious I felt myself to be. It seemed that the "intelligentsia" was not conscious of its own isolation and solitude in the small and dirty town, where all the people treat them like hostile strangers, do not want to hear either of Mik-

hailovsky or Spencer and have no interest for the question, how considerable is the part of the personality in an historical process?

At parties, the "intelligentsia" timidly made love to unknown grey little women; two of them, two sisters, were wonderfully like bats. I can see the thick-set, bandy-legged figure of Masin, a former naval officer, who had a special liking for Schopenhauer, and spoke eloquently and rapturously of the "metaphysics of love," of the "instinct of race," slightly affectedly pronouncing these words. The bats, pulling up their legs, lowered their eyes and wrapped themselves up tightly in their winged grey pederines, as though fearing that the words of the philosopher would display their nudity. And very soon Masin received from the brother of the bats, an important official of the Railway Board, the following note:

"If you, my dear sir, do not stop speaking before my sisters on the metaphysics of love, I will box your ears for you and address a complaint on you to the Chief of the railway line."

I watched and listened to all this and remembered the nights in Petrovsky's house, where, naked to its depths, the fierce and dark drama of instinct unfolded itself, and, blinding the reason, displayed the raving, despairing games of love. Half-savage people, thieves and drunkards rose to a state of ecstasy, beautifully and adeptly singing their wonderful national songs, while "philosophers," "radicals" and "narodniki" sang clumsily plaintive, vulgar little ditties like: " 'Twas not the autumn drizzling rain," "There, where the miry Boulak," or:

"Copernik worked all his life
To prove that the earth's turning round!
The dunce!" . . .

I had neither the brains nor the imagination nor the power to join together those two worlds—separated by a deep split of natural estrangement.

And now, at this hour, when I am writing about all what happened more than thirty years ago and see distinctly before me both the types of people, I feel myself completely powerless to trace with words the figures of the short-sighted bookworms in spectacles or eye-glasses, in "blousing" trousers, in varied waistcoats and monotonously speckled mantles of learned words. And this is not because the ones are coarse and angular and easier to grasp, while the others are smoothly polished by the iron of books. No, the reason of it, to my mind, lies in a deep, I should say racial, anyway inner, moral isolation.[1]

On one side tosses about eternally and senselessly the power of instinct; on the other flutters like a wingless bird the reason, locked up in the filthy cage of actuality. I think that in no other country have the creative powers of life been torn apart so mercilessly as they have been in Russia. When I spoke with a certain fear of the nightly ecstatic meetings at Petrovsky's, I felt the concealed envy of the people of "culture" towards the joys of life of the savages, and often it seemed to me that the pleasures of Petrovsky were

[1] Author's Note.—The anxious perception of the moral alienation of the "intelligentsia," that is the intellectual principle, from the popular element, has obstinately persecuted me all my life. In my literary works I often broached this topic; it inspired my story "My Companion," etc. Gradually this perception grew into the presentiment of a catastrophe.

condemned not in their substance, but only outwardly, formally, from a feeling of "decency."

Only P. B. Bajenoff said, sighing heavily:

"Peuh! how terrible it is!"

And added, chewing his beard:

"I'd have gone under among them like a bull in quagmire. The stronger the movement the sooner is it swallowed by mire. Yes. I understand that such as you are attracted by them; we others live an unleavened and every-day shallow life. And there—it is an epical existence. Do you know that Petrovsky ought to have been judged long ago but has a 'strong hand' in the Board? Some time ago they made a search in his house for another matter: a theft of tea out of a train. He took a paper out of his table and said, handing it to the inquiring judge: 'Here I have written down all that I have honestly stolen.' " Bajenoff frowned, thoughtfully closed his eyes, threw his hands up behind his neck and, after a short silence, said, smiling:

"What he had honestly—stolen—only a Russian could say anything of that kind, I assure you. We are really called, I think, to join the unjoinable. . . . We can be terribly gay, we can love cruelly. . . . And so on, in the same way . . ."

He got up from his chair, stretched himself out, spread out his hands and ended: "But, all the same, we Russians are a fine people! That is why, probably, we are unhappy beyond all measure. . . ." Bajenoff was one of the few people who roused in me a feeling of great sympathy and sincere respect. He was a seminarian from Tomsk and managed after a lot of trouble to get into the Kiev University, but was ex-

pelled in the second year for being "unreliable" and imprisoned there for several months. He had long hair which made him look like a disguised priest, and moved about with the precautions of an athlete that added to his broad tall figure a dignified stateliness unusual in a seminarian. He had a wonderfully soft voice but no ear whatever and treated music with hostility, saying:

"It draws one in the chaos. . . ."

His half-closed grey eyes looked tenderly out of a broad, pock-marked face in a dark square beard. I felt something clever and patronising in his relationship with me and the others. He told me in a very interesting way the story of the development of Christianity, spoke captivatingly of the sects in the dark ages, helped me to read the "History of Inductive Sciences" of Whewell. When he talked, he used to walk noiselessly and lightly up and down the room, his hands in his pockets and lifting his eyebrows, shake his head about—that was the only gesture with which he underlined the most considerable points of his speech. But at times, in the middle of a sentence, without finishing it, he started thinking, biting the hairs of his beard with his lips, scratching with his small finger his high forehead, disfigured by smallpox, and stood like that for a long time, in silence. Those moments—I do not know why—always filled me with a vague anguish. One day I asked him what he was thinking of?

"Such a lot of intellect is spent uselessly, such a lot of it," he said softly. "And what an intellect!"

He often spoke very convincingly of the beauty and power of thought.

"After all, my lad, all is decided by reason—that is the lever that will in time overturn the whole world."

"And the point of support?" I asked.

"The people," he said with conviction, shaking his head. "In particular—you, your brains."

I liked him very much, and believed in him sincerely.

On a quiet night, lying with him in the steppe, I told him how the policeman Nikiforich had spoken to me of compassion and what the Tolstoyan had said of the Bible and Darwin. He listened to me attentively, in silence, and replied:

"Darwin is the truth that I do not like, just as I would not have liked hell, if it had been the truth. But you see, my boy, the less friction among the different parts of a machinery, the better it works. In life it is the other way round: the stronger the friction —the more rapidly life reaches its aim and acquires a greater wisdom. And wisdom is justice, the harmony of interests. Consequently—it is necessary to acknowledge struggle as the actual law of life. And there your policeman is right: if life is a struggle—there is no place for compassion in it."

He grew thoughtful, lying on his back, looking into the sky with wide-open eyes.

The sun, sinking behind the clouds, had set fire to them and had melted in them, forming a huge woodpile of crimson coals, their red rays reposing in the steppe; and a rosy dew sprinkled the grey stalks of last year's grass-blades. The aroma of spring grass and flowers became stronger, more intoxicating. Bagenoff suddenly sat up, lighted a cigarette, but threw it away immediately, saying with a frown:

"I think that humanitarian ideas have come too late in life—about three thousand years too late. Well, I must go back to the town—are you coming?"

At the end of May, I was removed as a weigher to the Station Krutaja of the Volga-Don branch, and in June I received from Borissoglebsk a letter from a friend of mine, a book-binder, in which he informed me that Bajenoff had shot himself in the field by the cemetery; in the letter he had enclosed Bajenoff's note:

"Misha, sell my things and pay my landlord seven roubles, thirty kopecks. Have the books of Whewell nicely bound and send them to Krutaja; Peshkoff to Maximich, the 'old head'—Spencer I also leave to him. The other books are for you. The pile of books in Latin and Greek send to Kiev—the address is enclosed in them. Good-bye, my friend. B."

Having read the note I felt stunned, as though stricken at the heart. It was hard to have to reconcile oneself with the departure from life of this man who seemed so strong of spirit, so sober-minded.

What was it that had killed him? I remembered that once, sitting in a public-house, pouring some beer into my glass and growing a trifle tipsy, he suddenly said to me: "Do you know, Maximich, what the best song in the world is?" He bent across the table and looking into my eyes with the look of a kind bear, he sang softly and sadly in a low bass voice:

"Quand j'étais petit—
Je n'étais pas grand;
J'allais à l'école
Comme les petits enfants. . . ."

As he sang it, his eyes grew misty with tears.

"A charming song, upon my word. Such a simplicity lies in it and, you know, such a funny sadness." He translated the words into Russian for me, and I could not understand what it was that brought tears of rapture to the eyes of this big and hairy clever man. Afterwards—I met not a few people who had been killed by this "funny sadness."

. . . . . .

A few months later, life, sternly but carefully bringing me up, reminded me of Petrovsky, forcing me to go through one of the most dismal impressions of all my existence.

In Moscow, in a filthy public-house somewhere near the Sukharev town, a long lanky man in spectacles sat down at a table opposite to me. His bony face, pointed beard, sparse whiskers reminded me of Doré's drawings of Don Quixote. He wore a blue suit, not belonging to him, and nainsook grey trousers that were too short for him and had patched knees. One foot was in a rubber shoe—the other in a leather sole. Twisting his whiskers that were pointed like needles, he looked at me hungrily, with dim eyes, then stood up, arranging the eye-glasses on the grey brows and, shaking on his feet, groping with his hands like a blind man, he came up to me:

"Lawyer Gladkoff."

He traced his signature in the air with a flourish of his dirty fingers—and repeated imposingly:

"Alexei Gladkoff."

He spoke hoarsely and twirled his neck about as though strangled by a loop unseen to me.

Of course, he proved to be a man of noble heart, who had suffered for his disinterested service on the altar of truth and had been thrust by its enemies down to the "depths of life." Now he was standing at the head of the order of "Saint Aquavita," copying petitions for the theatres, protecting oppressed innocence and also shooting at the hearts and purses of poor, loving merchants' wives. "The Russian—and still more his woman—loves to suffer: suffering, or the tales of it, is the moral mustard without which nothing can penetrate into the heart, fattened by the varied and abundant food of the flesh."

I had observed already many people of that type. I had been used to treat them with distrust, but always with intense interest. In a man climbing obstinately upwards, the interest for people who have fallen down from above is very logical. Also the so-called "fallen people," the dark sinners, are often richer morally and even of a finer quality than the acknowledged godly beings which I considered already in my youth very like the wax figures in a panopticon.

About two hours later I was lying next to Gladkoff on the wooden benches of a dismal night-barrack. Lying with his head resting on his arms, his body stretched out like a rod, the advocate consoled me with aphorisms of a wolf-like fierceness, his small beard stuck out like a devil's tail that trembled every time he coughed; he was touchingly pitiful in his powerless fury, and, like a hedgehog, arrayed himself in the quills of caustic words.

Over our heads hung the vaulted ceiling of a basement; a rusty, nauseous dampness trickled down the walls; an acid smell of putrefying earth rose from the

floor; in the shadows unknown bodies roamed and snored, wrapped in ragged clothing. The window, with thick iron bars, looked into a hole laid out with bricks; a cat sat in it, evidently a sick one, for it mewed plaintively. On the wooden benches under the window sat in a Turkish pose a hideously fat hairy human being; he was mending his trousers by the light of a candle-end and hoarsely howling a troparion to the Virgin Mary. Having sung it, he soundly smacked his fat lips and began the hymn all over again.

"Pimen Masloff, a chemist and a genius," recommended Gladkoff. In this hole a few more geniuses lay about, among them the "illustre" pianist Bragin, a clever little man who looked like a youth, although he had silver threads in his wavy hair and blue bags under his eyes. I was surprised by the duplicity of his face: a bitter smile was irreconciliably contradicted by the sad beauty of his feminine eyes, his lips were thin and the wicked smile seemed stuck to them immovably forever. In the morning Gladkoff said to me: "Now we are going to consecrate, as a knight of the order of Aquavita, a new follower, this one. Watch; this is a marvellous ceremony."

He pointed out to me a young curly-headed man in a shirt, without trousers. He was purple with everlasting drink; the blue pupils of his eyes were congealed in the bloodshot eyeballs. He was sitting on one of the wooden benches; in front of him stood the fat chemist, painting his cheeks with fuchsine and his brows and whiskers with a burnt cork.

"Don't do that," muttered the curly-headed one, dangling his bare legs about, while Gladkoff was telling me, twisting his whiskers:

"He's a merchant's son, a student; it's the fifth week that he's drinking with us. He's spent all he had in drink, money and clothes!"

Then appeared a round, fat woman. The bridge of her nose had fallen through or been knocked out and she had insolent, provoking eyes; she brought a bundle of bast-mats with her and threw it on the benches, saying:

"The vestments are ready."

"Let us dress him!" cried Gladkoff. Five people, grey and hairy, roamed like phantoms in the darkness of the basement; the "pianist" was blowing assiduously at some coals on a frying-pan. From time to time they threw to each other disconnected short words.

"Move on!"

"Sh-sh, be quiet!"

"What are you up to?"

They dragged the benches into the middle of the basement. Masloff attired himself in a chasuble of bast-mats, put on a pasteboard calotte, and Gladkoff was disguised as a deacon.

Four men seized the curly-headed student by the arms and legs.

"No. Don't, please don't," he sighed, as they laid him on the bench.

"Choir ready?" shouted the advocate, brandishing the frying-pan and dispersing smoke over the lying man; coals crackled in it and a blue smoke of smouldering leaves rose from them. The man lay on the bench, wrinkling up his nose. He coughed, shutting his eyes, twisting his feet like a fly and striking the boards with his soles.

"Hear!" announced Gladkoff, wrapped up in the bast-mats. He became terribly like a caricature, twisting his neck very sharply and shaking about his head, making a weird grimace.

Masloff, standing at the feet of the student, began declaiming in nasal tones:

"Brothers! Let us appeal to the Devil to rest the soul of the freshly deceased youth Sakov from drink and Babylonian vice. May Satan accept him with honour and joy and sink him in the abominations of hell forever and ever!"

Five hairy tramps, standing in a thick line on the right side of the benches, sullenly sang the blasphemous song; their hoarse voices rang dully and smothered in the stone hole. The part of the preceptor was played by Bragin; he conducted with a graceful movement of his right hand, while the left one was lifted in a gesture of warning.

It was hard to surprise me with shamelessness—I had seen too much of it in different shapes—but those people were singing something abominable, displaying by the combination of shameless words and pictures a really devilish imagination, a boundless depravity. Neither before nor after that day did I hear of anything equally refined and despairing in its depravity. Five throats were pouring on one man a stream of poisonous filth. They did it without any enthusiasm, as something which was a duty; they did not treat it as a joke—they were officiating—and it was clear that it did not happen for the first time, for the ceremony of a man's extermination was performed smoothly, connectedly and solemnly, as in a church.

Entirely horrified by what I saw, I listened to the peculiar nasal exclamations of Gladkoff, to the cynical reading of the "chemist," to the smothered singing of the choir, and watched the man who was being buried alive and at whose corpse a blasphemous liturgy was being officiated. Lying with hands folded on the breast, he moved his lips, muttering something, winked with wide-open eyes, smiling a silly smile, and from time to time trembled frightenedly, trying to jump off the benches; then the choir pressed him gently and silently back to the boards.

Probably the ceremony would have appeared less repulsive had the dirty phantoms regarded it as a joke and a game, had they laughed over it even with the laugh of cynics, with the laugh of despair of "people that have been," that are disfigured by life and are bitterly thwarted by it. But, no; they treated their doings with the surly intensity of murderers, they behaved like pagan priests bringing a sacrifice to the spirit of a sickly and vengefully unbridled imagination.

Stunned and helpless, I felt that a terrible weight was oppressing me, pushing me into an impassable mire; it seemed as though these people were burying me, too. I remember that I smiled, a stupid and disconcerted smile, and there was a moment when I wanted to implore:

"Stop that—it is wrong—it is terrible—it is not a joke at all."

The sharp voice of the "pianist" especially tore at my ear; he howled ecstatically, shutting his eyes, throwing back his head and straining his neck. His howl, drowning the hoarse voices of the other singers,

swam in the smoky fog and displayed with a peculiar sensuality the abomination of the words. I was filled with a savage longing to growl and wail.

"The grave!" cried Gladkoff, brandishing the frying-pan that served as the incensory. The choir roared with all its strength:

"Approach, approach,
Grave, grave . . ."

and in came the woman with the broken nose-bridge quite naked. She came dancing about as she went; her flabby body trembled, her fat legs were covered with purple bruises and scars and blue swollen veins.

Masloff met her with an indecent gesture which was repeated by Gladkoff; the woman, yelping out obscenities, embraced them each in turn, then the choir lifted her by her arms and legs and placed her on the bench near the deceased.

"Oh—oh! Don't!" he cried, shrieking, again attempting to get off from the bench, but he was pressed back to it, and then, to a new dancing but nevertheless dismal tune of a disgusting song, the woman, bending down on him, shaking her greyish and dirty wallets of breasts over him, began silently to perform over him an obscene parody of physical communion.

Here I remembered the "Queen Margot"—the most beautiful dream of my life. Something exploded in my breast and I rushed at those remaining fragments of people, knocking their teeth out with my fists.

. . . Towards the evening I found myself under the bank of the railway line, on a heap of sleepers; the fingers of my hands were broken and bruised,

blood was flowing from them, while my left eye was swollen and sore. From the sky, as dirty as the earth, fell a thin autumn rain; I drew out trusses of wet, faded grass and, wiping with it my face and hands, thought of what had just been exhibited to me.

I was a healthy lad and possessed of an unusual strength. I could make nine times, without hurrying, the sign of the cross with an eighty-pound weight in my hand, easily carried about sacks of flour weighing two hundred pounds each—but in that hour I felt myself quite emptied and weak, like a sick child. I wanted to cry from a feeling of bitter offense. I had sought greedily for a communion with the beauty of life of which so temptingly spoke the books I had read. I wanted to admire with gladness something that would imbue me with strength to live. The time had come for me to experience the joys of life, for I felt oftener and oftener the flow and impulse of fury. It rose in a dark and hot wave to my breast, blinding the reason; its power transformed my sharp attention to people in a feeling of repulsion and contempt for them. It was painfully annoying to find that I was continually meeting on my way things filthy and stupid, pitiful and strange.

It was anguishing to recall "the ceremony" in the night-barrack; the ear was drilled by the cry of Gladkoff:

"The grave!"

and before my eyes drifted asunder the repellent body of the woman—like a heap of wicked and lustful abomination in which one had wanted to bury a living being.

And here I remembered the licentiousness of the "Monastic life" of Petrovsky and felt how innocent is the raging of flesh in healthy people in comparison to the fury of putridness which has not lost entirely the outward aspect of man.

There—there was a certain idolatry of beauty there; half-savage people prayed out of an overflow of strength, considering that overflow as a sin and a chastisement, perhaps revolting in a phantom-like hope for freedom, fearing to "ruin their soul" in the insatiable thirst of the body.

Here impotence has sunk to a dismal despair, to an abominable and revengeful derision of that instinct that incessantly sows afresh the fields of life ravaged by death and is the stimulant of all the beauty of the world. Here the very root of life was obscurely undermined through the poisoning of its mysteriously beautiful sources by the pus of a sickly imagination.

But what must life be like, high up over there, whence people fall so terribly low?

VI

AT that time, evidently with the view of educating me, fate made me undergo the tragi-comical emotions of a first love.

A group of friends had planned to go boating on the Oka and I was charged to ask the couple C—— to join our party. The C——'s had recently arrived from France and I had not yet met them. I went to their house for the first time on that evening.

They lived in the basement of an old house whose entrance was adorned by a huge pool of dirty water; this pool never dried up in the spring and sometimes not even in summer. Crows and dogs used it as a looking-glass, while pigs bathed in it.

In a rather pensive state of mind, I tumbled into these people, totally strange to me, like a stone rolling from a hill—and perturbed all the inhabitants of it. A fat, middle-sized man emerged from the door and confronted me sullenly, barring my way into the next room. He had a neat, flaxen beard and kind eyes.

Trying to improve his rather untidy appearance, he asked me, ungraciously:

"What do you want?"

And added, impressively:

"Before coming in, one should always knock at the door."

Behind his back, in the dimness of the room, something resembling a large white bird was fluttering and tossing about. A voice clear and gay rang out:

"Particularly, if you visit married people." Rather crossly I asked them whether they were the people I was looking for, and at the affirmative answer of the man, who looked like a prosperous shopkeeper, I explained what I had come for.

"You say that C—— sent you?" inquired the man, steadily and pensively, stroking his hand, and at that very moment turned round, starting and exclaiming as if in pain:

"Oh, Olga!"

At the convulsive movement of his hand, I guessed that he had been pinched in the part of his body which is usually not spoken of probably because it is situated slightly below the back.

A young, slim girl came and stood in his place, holding the door-posts and looking at me with a smile in her blue eyes.

"Who are you? A policeman?"

"No, it is only my trousers," I answered, politely, and she laughed.

Her laugh was not offensive, for in her eyes shone the smile for which I had waited so long. Evidently it was my dress that roused her hilarity. I wore the blue trousers of a policeman, and, instead of a shirt, the white jacket of a cook. It is a very practical garment; playing the part of a waistcoat and buttoning up to the neck, it avoids the necessity of a shirt. Someone's shooting-boots and the wide hat of an Italian bandit put the finishing touch to my attire.

Dragging me into the room and pushing me onto a chair, she asked, standing by:

"Why are you dressed so funnily?"

"Why funnily?"

"Don't be cross," she advised in a friendly way.

Such a strange girl; who could be angry with her?

The bearded gentleman, sitting on the bed, was busy rolling one cigarette after the other. I asked, looking at him:

"Is this your father, or brother?"

"Her husband," he answered, with assurance.

"Why do you ask?" she laughed.

I stood staring at her; then, after some reflection: "Please forgive me!" I said.

Our conversation continued in this laconic style for about five minutes, but I felt myself capable of sitting motionless in that basement for hours, days, years, looking at the narrow oval face of the lady and at her caressing eyes. Her small lower lip was slightly thicker than the upper one and looked a trifle swollen; her thick chestnut-coloured hair, cut short, formed for her a sumptuous head-dress, falling in soft ringlets over her rosy ears and flushed girlish cheeks. Her hands were very pretty; as she stood, holding the posts of the door, I could see her arms bare up to the shoulder. She was dressed in a strangely simple way: in a white lace blouse with wide sleeves and an equally white, neatly-cut skirt. But the most wonderful thing was her eyes; they shone so gaily, caressingly, with such friendly curiosity. And there was no doubt whatsoever! She smiled with the smile that is so intensely needed to the heart of a man twenty years of age, whose heart, injured by the brutality of life, thirsts for affection.

"There will be a pouring rain in a moment," announced her husband, blowing smoke into his beard.

I looked at the window: the sky was cloudless and

the stars shone brightly. I realised then that my presence was offensive to the man, and I went away, my soul full of a peaceful gladness, as when one meets something which, secretly even to oneself, one has sought for a long time.

All the night I roamed in the field, admiring gently the caressing radiance of the blue eyes, and at dawn I was perfectly convinced that the little lady was no mate for the bearded old bear with the kind eyes of a contented cat. I even pitied her, the poor thing! Fancy living with a man who kept bread-crumbs in his beard!

And the next day we drove in the boat down the troubled waters of the Oka, along the high bank formed of broad layers of many-coloured snarl. The day was the finest one since the world's creation; the sun was wonderfully brilliant and the sky seemed arrayed for a feast; the air over the river was impregnated with a smell of ripe strawberries; all the people suddenly remembered that they really were perfect people and this filled me with joyful affection for them. Even the husband of the lady of my heart proved to be a remarkable person: he did not get into the same boat as his wife, where I sat at the oars, and behaved the whole day in a wonderfully clever way. At the beginning he told us all a lot of curious things about old Gladstone, and after this, having drunk a jug of excellent milk, he lay down under a bush and slept until the evening with the sleep of a new-born babe. Our boat, of course, came first to the place of the picnic, and as I carried my lady onto the shore in my arms she said:

"How strong you are!"

I felt myself capable of overthrowing any tower in the place and told the lady that I could carry her in my arms to the town; that was at a distance of seven kilometers. She laughed gently, caressing me with her eyes; they shone in front of me the whole day, and I felt convinced, of course, that they shone for me alone.

The whole thing went on with a rapidity very natural to a woman who had met a rather interesting specimen of an animal, and to a healthy youth who needed the tenderness of a woman. I learnt soon that, in spite of her youthful appearance, she was ten years older than myself, that she had been educated in a school for "noble maidens" in Bielostok, had been engaged to the Commandant of the Winter Palace and lived in Paris, where she had studied and learnt obstetrics. It appeared that her mother, too, had been a mid-wife and had assisted at my arrival in this world. I took this to be an omen and rejoiced over it.

Her acquaintance with the Bohemian crowd as well as with emigrants, with one of whom she had a short love affair, also a wandering life of starvation or something very near to it, in all the basements and attics of Paris, Petersburg and Vienna, all this had transformed this schoolgirl into a complicated, queer and intensely interesting piece of humanity. Light and swift as a titmouse, she observed life and people with the sharp curiosity of a clever young animal. She knew how to sing provoking French songs, smoked very gracefully, could draw very cleverly, acted charmingly in theatricals; she also sewed all her frocks and trimmed hats. As to obstetrics, she never bothered about it. "I have nursed four cases," she

used to say, "but they gave a death rate of seventy-five per cent."

This left her forever with a distaste for the work of indirectly assisting in the increase of humanity. As to her direct participation in this honourable occupation, it was proved by the existence of her daughter, a charming and beautiful child of four. She used to speak of herself in the tone with which one speaks of a person whom one knows very well and who therefore bores one. But sometimes she spoke of herself in a certain amazement; her eyes then would shine brightly and grow dark and a slightly timid smile would pass through them, the shy smile of a child.

I was intensely conscious of her acute and tenacious mind; I knew her to be of a higher culture than myself. I noticed the kind and a trifle condescending way she had with other people; she was, of course, incomparably more attractive than all the other women and girls I knew. The careless style of her conversation used to astound me, and I thought: this person, while knowing all that is known to my revolutionary-minded friends, knows also something more valuable, but she looks at everything from aside, observing with the smile of a grown-up person the charming, although dangerous, childish frolics that she had indulged in at one time.

The basement where she lived was divided into two rooms: a small kitchen, which served also as an entrance, and a large room with three windows looking out on the street and two onto the dirty, littered yard. It was a comfortable enough place for the workshop of a shoemaker, but not for a refined little woman who had lived in Paris, in the sacred city of

the Great Revolution, in the town of Molière, Beaumarchais, Hugo and other great men. There were many other things inadequate to the picture and its frame; they all affected me very sharply, and among other feelings excited a great pity for the woman. She, however, did not notice all these things which, to my mind, ought to have been offensive to her.

She worked from morning till night, in the morning busying herself with the kitchen and the house, and when that was finished she sat down at a large table under the window and made pencil drawings the whole day, copying photographs of different local personalities, tracing maps, colouring cartagrams, helping her husband to make statistical reviews for the Zemstvo. The dust of the street blew from the open window onto her hair; the fat, thick shadows of the passers-by glided on the papers. She sang as she worked, and, growing tired of sitting, she would jump up and waltz with her chair or play with the child. In spite of the quantities of dirty work which fell to her task, she was always as clean as a cat.

Her husband was placid and lazy. He liked lying in bed reading translated novels, especially those of the elder Dumas. "This clears the cells of the brain," he said. It pleased him to observe life from the "strictly scientific point of view." He called his dinner "the partaking of food," and after having eaten, used to say:

"The conveyance of the digestive juice from the stomach to the different cells of our organism demands absolute rest."

And forgetting to shake the crumbs out of his beard, he would lie down on his bed, read Dumas or

Xavier de Montespan with absorption for a few minutes, and then, for two or three hours, whistle lyrical songs through his nose, his fair moustache moving gently as if something unseen was buried under it. On waking up he would stare for a long time pensively at the cracks in the ceiling; then remembering suddenly:

"All the same, Kusma was wrong in his interpretation of the idea of Parnell!"

And he would go and argue with Kusma, telling his wife:

"Please finish up for me the account of the horseless peasants from the Maidan district. I will soon be back."

He came back about midnight or later in a very cheerful state of mind.

"Well, you know, I thoroughly defeated Kusma to-day! He has a fine memory for quotations, the scoundrel, but I don't give him any points in this. And, what is more, do you know that he has no comprehension of Gladstone's policy in the East, the curious fellow!"

He continually spoke of Binet, Richet and the hygiene of the brain and, sitting at home in bad weather, busied himself educating the daughter of his wife, a child born accidentally somewhere between two love stories.

"Liolia, you must chew carefully when you eat; this facilitates the digestion and helps the stomach to transmute the digestive juice into a more assimilative conglomeration of chemical substance."

After dinner, having attained the state of "absolute rest," he would put the child to bed and send it

to sleep with stories of the following nature: "And so, after the bloodthirsty and ambitious Bonaparte had usurped the power . . ."

His wife used to cry with laughter listening to these lectures, but he was not angry with her, and he soon went to sleep himself. The little girl, after having played a while with his silken beard, also went to sleep, curled up together like a ball. I made great friends with her; she listened to me with greater interest than she did to the lectures of Boleslav on the bloodthirsty usurper and Josephine's mournful love of him, and this excited a curious feeling of jealousy on the part of Boleslav.

"I protest, Peshkov!" he would say. "The child must be introduced to the fundamental principles of the human relations with actuality and only then acquainted with it. If you knew English and could read 'The Hygiene of a Child's Soul' . . ." He himself knew only one word in English, I think, and that was: "good-bye." He was twice as old as I, but had the curiosity of a young poodle. He liked to gossip and to show off as a man to whom all the mysteries of not only Russian but also foreign revolutionary circles are well known. However, he was perhaps actually well informed. Mysterious people used to come often to see him; they all behaved like tragic actors who incidentally have to play the parts of simpletons. At his house I met the revolutionist Sabunaeff in a red, clumsily set-on wig and a speckled suit of clothes which was much too narrow and short for him.

And one day, as I came to Boleslav, I found there an alert little man with a small head, resembling a hair-dresser. He wore a pair of checkered trousers,

a grey waistcoat and creaking boots. Boleslav pushed me into the kitchen and whispered:

"This man comes from Paris. He has an important message for Korolenko. Please arrange that he should see him. . . ."

I undertook to do it, but it appeared that someone pointed out the newly-arrived to Korolenko in the street, and V. G. sagaciously remarked: "No, I do not want to have anything to do with that coxcomb."

Boleslav was hurt for his Parisian friend and for the "work of revolution," and for two days sat concocting a letter to Korolenko; he tried every style from the infuriated and stern to the affectionately reproving, and then burned these samples of epistolic literature in the fire. Very soon there occurred a great number of arrests in Moscow, Nijni, Vladimir, and the man in the checkered trousers proved to be the "famous" Landeson-Harting, chronologically the first provocator I had ever seen.

Apart from all this, the husband of my beloved one was a good fellow, a trifle sentimental and comically overburdened with "scientific knowledge." He had been heard to say himself:

"The life's aim of a man belonging to the 'intelligentsia' is an uninterrupted accumulation of scientific luggage in the view of distributing it disinterestedly among the masses of the people."

. . . . . .

My love, growing deeper, became a torture. I would sit in the basement, watching the lady of my heart as she worked, bent over the table, and get gloomily in-

toxicated with the desire of taking her into my arms, carrying her somewhere away from this cursed basement, crowded with a large double bed, an ancient and heavy sofa, where slept the child, and many tables on which dusty books and papers lay spread out. Strange feet hurried rapidly past the window—sometimes the head of a homeless dog would peep in—it was stuffy; a smell of mud, warmed by the sun, came in a gust from the street. The slight, girlish figure sat gently humming a song and grating on the paper with a pen or a pencil, her eyes, blue as cornflowers, smiled at me caressingly. I loved that woman deliriously, madly, and I pitied her with an evil-minded longing.

"Tell me some more about yourself," she would propose.

And I would start telling her, but she would stop me, in a few minutes, saying:

"This is not about yourself."

I realised myself that all that I said applied not to myself, but to something in which I was blindly entangled. I felt that I must try to find myself in this varied and complicated confusion of impressions and facts which I had gone through, but I felt helpless and frightened and did not know where to begin. Who am I and what am I? This question troubled me very seriously. I was angry with life, for it had already inspired me with the abasing stupidity of attempting suicide. I could not understand the people around me, their lives seemed to me all wrong, unjustifiably stupid and filthy. A sharpened curiosity troubled me, the curiosity of a man who for some reason or other wants to have a look into all the dark corners of existence; into the depths of all the mys-

teries of life, and sometimes I felt myself capable of committing a crime merely out of curiosity. I was ready to murder someone, only to know what would happen to me next?

It seemed to me, that should I find my own self, a loathsome man, entangled in a solid net of strange feelings and thoughts, I would appear before the eyes of the lady of my heart, a delirious and raving person who would frighten her and repulse her. I had at first to undergo some inner transformation. I was so sure that this was the only woman who was capable not only to help me to become sensible of my own self, but that she could also effect some magic, after which I would be immediately set free from the captivity of dark inpressions; I would cast something out of my soul forever and it would blaze with the fire of a great power and of a great joy.

The careless tone with which she spoke of her own self and the condescending way in which she treated other people, convinced me firmly that this human being knew something which was beyond common knowledge. That she had her own key to all the riddles of life, and that this was the reason why she was always gay, always sure of herself. Perhaps I loved her most of all for all that I could not understand in her; anyway, I loved her with all the power and passion of youth. It was a torture to me to have to restrain this passion—for it consumed me physically and drained all my strength. It would have been easier for me to bear had I been of a simpler and more brutal turn of mind, but I believed that one's relations with a woman are not limited to the act of physical union, with which I was acquainted in its

poorest and crudest shape; this act filled me with repulsion, in spite of my being a strong and rather sensual lad with an excitable imagination.

I cannot realise how this romantic dream of mine had formed itself and how it lived in my imagination, but I was perfectly convinced that beyond what was known to me, there was something that I was ignorant of, and in it lay the great mysterious meaning of the communion between a man and a woman. I believed that something great, something full of joy and even full of terror was buried in the first embrace and that a man was transformed by living through that joy. I do not think that I drew these fanciful ideas from the novels I had read; they grew and developed themselves out of a spirit of contradiction to reality, for:

"I have come into the world not to acquiesce."

And, besides, I had a dim and strange recollection: as if somewhere beyond the limits of reality, sometime in my early childhood, I had experienced a strong explosion of the soul, a sweet tremor born of the perception, more so of the presentiment of harmony, and lived then through a joy more brilliant than is the sun in the morning, when it rises. It might have been still in the days when I lay under my mother's breast, and this happy explosion of her nervous energy was transmitted to me by a warm shock which created my soul and was the first to light it for life; perhaps it was this supreme moment of happiness, experienced by my mother, which left its mark on my whole life by rousing in me a tremulous expectation of something

uncommonly beautiful coming to one through the woman.

When one does not know—one imagines. And the most perfect knowledge obtained by man is the knowledge of loving a woman, of worshipping her beauty; all the beauty there is in the world is born from a man's love for a woman.

One day, as I was out bathing, I dived from the stern of the barge into the water, struck my breast against the wall-tie and, catching my foot in the rope, hung down headfirst in the water and choked. A drayman pulled me out; they shook me back to life, tearing the skin off my body, and as a result I got a hæmorrhage of the throat and had to get into bed and swallow ice.

My lady came to me, sat by my bed-side, and, asking how the whole thing happened, stroked my head with a dear, gentle hand, while her eyes drew dark and looked troubled.

I asked whether she had noticed that I loved her?

"Yes," she said, smiling cautiously, "I have noticed it—and it is all very wrong, although I, too, have learnt to love you." Of course, having heard these words, the whole earth trembled and the trees in the garden turned round in a gay dance. I was struck dumb with rapture, so unexpected was my joy, and buried my head in her knees. Had I not also pressed her hard against me, I would have probably flown out of the window like a soap-bubble.

"Don't move, it is bad for you," she said severely, trying to put my head back to the pillow. "And don't fidget, or else I will go. You are altogether a very

mad person; I did not think that such people existed. We will talk over our feelings and the whole situation as soon as you are up and well."

A few days after this I was sitting in the field on the edge of a ravine; underneath, in the bushes, rustled the wind. A grey sky threatened us with rain. Simple, business-like words a woman spoke to me of the difference in our years, told me that I ought to go on with my studies and that it was premature to burden myself with a wife and a child. It all was depressingly true and was said in the tone of a mother, which fact excited still more my love and respect for the dear woman. I felt unutterably sad and happy as I listened to her tender words; it was the first time that anyone had spoken to me like that.

I sat staring into the mouth of the ravine, where the bushes, shaken by the wind, streamed along like a green river, and vowed that I should repay her tender kindness with all the strength of my soul. "Before deciding anything, we must think it over carefully." I heard her soft voice. She was striking her knees with the branch of a nut-tree and looking towards the town which lay hidden among the green hills of the gardens.

"Of course, I must talk the matter over with Boleslav. He feels there is something wrong and behaves very nervously. And I hate dramatic situations."

Everything was very sad and lovely, but something funny and vulgar was bound to take place. My trousers were too large for me in the waist and I pinned them up with a long brass pin, about three inches long.

The sharp edge of the pin was continuously tearing gently at the skin—and, at an awkward moment, the

whole pin struck into my rib. I managed to pull it out, unnoticed, and felt, to my horror, that blood was streaming out of the deep scratch and staining the trousers. I wore no underclothes and the cook's jacket reached only to the waist.

How was I to get up and walk with my wet trousers clinging to my body?

Realizing the comical side of the incident and deeply indignant with the offensive shape it had taken, I began to talk with great excitement in the unnatural way of an actor who has forgotten his part.

She listened to me for a few moments, attentively at first, then with evident astonishment, and finally said:

"What pompous words! You have suddenly ceased to be yourself!"

This helped to stagger me altogether and I shut up, strangled with emotion.

"It is time to go; it will rain very soon."

"I will remain here."

"Why?"

What answer could I give her?

"You are angry with me?" she asked, tenderly looking at my face.

"Oh, no, only with myself."

"There is no need for you to be angry with yourself, either," she advised, getting up to go. And I could not get up, sitting helplessly in a warm pool. It seemed to me that my blood streaming out of my side, murmured like a brook; in a moment she will hear that noise and ask:

"What is that?"

"Go away," I prayed mentally. She granted me

kindly a few more tender words and departed, following the ravine along its edge and swaying gracefully on her pretty legs as she went.

I watched her supple form grow smaller and smaller as the distance between us became greater, then I lay on the ground, overcome by the shock of the consciousness that my first love would be an unhappy one.

Of course, that also was the case: her husband shed a shower of tears, sentimental nonsense and pitiful words, and she had not the courage to swim over to my side across those sticky waters.

"He is so helpless, you are so strong," she told me with tears in her eyes. "He said to me: 'If you leave me, I will perish like a flower without sun.' "

I could not help laughing, as I rememebered the short little legs, the feminine hips and the round belly of the flower. Flies lived in his beard, there was always food for them there.

She added, smiling:

"Yes, I know it sounds funny; but all the same, he is very miserable."

"I am, too."

"Oh, you are young, you are strong. . . ."

Then, for the first time, I think, I began to hate weak natures. In the future and in more earnest cases I often had occasion to observe how tragically helpless are the strong when surrounded by the weak, what a lot of valuable energy of heart and brains is wasted in order to support the useless existence of those who are doomed to perdition.

Very soon after that, in a state which was bordering on madness, I left the town, and for two years roamed about the roads of Russia like a will-o'-the-wisp. I

made the tour of the Pokoljie, the Don, the Ukraine and Crimea and the Caucasus, went through the most varied experiences and impressions, got hardened and still more bitter, but kept the image of the woman I loved untarnished in my soul, although I met some who were both cleverer and better.

After more than two years had gone by and while I was in Tiflis in the autumn, some one announced to me that she had come back from Paris and had rejoiced at the news that I lived in the same town. I, a strong youth of twenty-three, fell down in a swoon for the first time in my life. I could not bring myself to go to her, but very soon she asked me, through some friends of hers, to come to see her.

She seemed to me still lovelier and dearer, always the same girlish figure, the same tender flush on her cheeks and caressing radiance of the corn-flower eyes. Her husband had remained in France, but her daughter, swift and graceful as a little goat, was with her.

As I went to her, a storm rose over the town, a storm with thunder and lightning, the rain roared and a powerful stream flew in a rapid current along the street from the hill of St. David, digging out the stones of the pavement. The howling of the wind, the angry splash of the water, the rumbling of destruction shattered the house, the window-panes rattled, a blue light poured into the room and everything around seemed to be precipitated into a wet and fathomless abyss.

The frightened child buried herself in her pillows, while we stood at the window, blinded by the explosions of the sky and, for an unknown reason, spoke in a whisper.

"I have never seen a storm like this before," rattled at my side the words of the woman I loved.

And all of a sudden she asked:

"Well, are you cured of your love for me?"

"No."

She seemed surprised and went on, still in a whisper:

"How changed you are! You have become quite another man."

She slowly sank into a chair next to the window and, blinded by a terrible flash of lightning, started and pressed her hands over her eyes and whispered again:

"People speak a lot about you here. Why did you come? Tell me what you have been doing all this time."

My God, how small she was and how perfect!

I sat and talked to her until midnight, telling her everything, as if in confession. The austere manifestations of nature always act as a stimulant on me, filling me with boisterous gaiety. I think I spoke well—her attention and the concentrated glance of her wide-open eyes proved it to me. Sometimes she would whisper:

"This is terrible."

As I went away, I noticed that she said good-bye to me without the protecting smile of a grown-up person, which always hurt me a little in the past. I followed the wet streets, watching how the sharp circle of the moon cut through the torn clouds, and my head reeled from happiness. On the next day, I sent her something that resembled verses—she used to recite them often afterwards, and I can recall them still in my memory.

My lady!
For a caress, for a tender glance
A skilful conjurer gives
Himself up to captivity,
He is adept in the art
Of creating small joys
Out of trifles, out of nothing.
Take the gay captive!—
Perhaps out of small joys
He might create a great happiness,
Has the world after all not been created
Out of the mere dust grains of matter!—
Oh, yes! The world is not a cheerful creation,
Its joys are niggardly and poor,
But still it has some funny things in it.—
For instance: Your humble servant—
And it also has things of beauty:
Meaning—you!—
You!
But—silence!
What are the blunt nails of words
When compared to your heart,
The most beautiful of all the flowers
Of the earth, who has so few of them?

This, of course, can hardly be called poetry, but it was composed in gay sincerity.

Here I am again, sitting opposite a human being that seems to me to be the best one in the world, and, therefore, the one I most need. She has a blue dress on; it wraps her like a soft, scented cloud, without hiding the fine lines of her body. She plays with the strings of her belt and speaks to me in the most wonderful, uncommon words; I watch every movement of

her small fingers with rosy nails, and feel myself like a violin which is being tuned by a clever musician. I want to die, I want somehow to inhale this woman into my soul, that she should remain there forever. My body sings in a languorous tension, painfully acute, and it seems to me that my heart will explode in a moment. I read my first story to her; it had just been published, but I cannot remember what she thought of it; I think she was surprised:

"So you have started writing prose?"

It seems to me that I can hear her coming from afar as in a dream:

"I have thought a lot about you in these years. Is it possible that it is through me that you have had to experience all these hardships?"

I tell her something about there being nothing hard or terrible in the world where she lives.

"What a dear you are . . ."

I want madly to take her into my arms, but they are so ridiculously long and heavy; I do not dare to touch her, I am so afraid of hurting her, and so I stand, shaking from the impetuous beating of my heart and murmur:

"Come and live with me. Please, do come and live with me!"

She laughs—softly and shyly. Her eyes shine dazzlingly—she goes to the other end of the room and from there: "Let us do like this: you will go to Nijni —and I will remain here and think it all over and write to you," she says.

I bow to her respectfully, like the hero of a novel I read some time ago and turn away, walking on clouds.

In the winter she came to me in Nijni, together with her daughter.

"When a poor man marries, even the night is too short," says a wise proverb, half-sadly, half-mockingly. I verified through personal experience the deep truth of it.

We rented, for two roubles a month, a whole palace, an old bath-house in the garden of a priest. I lived in the forefront, while my wife established herself in the one big room which served at the same time as a drawing-room. The palace was hardly adjusted for married life; it froze in all the corners and grooves. When I worked at night I wrapped myself up in all the clothes I possessed, covered myself with a carpet and in spite of this acquired a very strong rheumatism. This was hardly credible considering my health and endurance, of which at that time I felt very proud.

The room itself was a trifle warmer, but when I lighted the stove, all our abode was filled with a smell of putridness, soap and steaming bath-rooms. The girl, who looked like a little graceful china doll with lovely eyes, became nervous and suffered from headaches. And in the spring the bath-house was invaded by spiders and ear-wigs in great quantities; both mother and daughter were convulsed with fear of them and I spent hours trying to kill them with an india-rubber shoe. The small windows were thickly overgrown with bushes of elder and wild raspberries, the room was always gloomy and the capricious and alcoholic priest would not let me either root out or clip the bushes.

Of course, we might have found a more comfortable

domicile, but we owed money to the priest and he liked me and refused to let us go.

"You will get used to it," he would say. "And if not, then pay your debts and you may go where you like, even to the English."

He did not like English people, affirming:

"They are a lazy nation; the only thing they ever invented is playing patience and they do not know how to fight."

He was a huge fellow, with a round red face and a broad red beard. He drank so heavily that he could not officiate in church any more, and was miserably, tearfully in love with a small, sharp-nosed and dark little seamstress, who resembled a jack-daw.

He used to tell me of her treacheries, and shaking off the tears from his beard with the palm of his hand, he would say:

"I can well guess that she is a worthless woman, but she reminds me of Saint Thymiama, and for that —I love her."

I looked carefully through the saints' calendar, but did not succeed in finding a saint of that name.

He was highly indignant with me for being an unbeliever and shattered my soul with the following arguments in favour of faith: "My son, you must look at the matter from a practical point of view: there are not many unbelievers, while believers can be counted in millions! And why is that? Because as the fish liveth not without water, so does the soul not live outside the church. Is that not convincing enough? Therefore—let us drink to it!"

"I do not drink, I have rheumatism."

He would poke his fork into a herring, lift it threateningly up in the air, and say:

"This, too, comes from lack of faith—"

I spent sleepless nights, feeling miserably and cruelly ashamed of this bath-house before my wife; of the impossibility which often arose to buy meat for dinner or a plaything for the little girl; of all this cursed, ridiculous poverty. Poverty is a vice, which personally did nor trouble or torment me, but for the little refined woman and particularly for her daughter such an existence was debasing—it was hell.

In the night, sitting in my corner at the table, copying out petitions, appeals and cassations, writing stories, I used to grind my teeth together and curse myself, humanity, fate and love.

The lady behaved as generously as a mother who does not want her son to notice her troubles. Not one complaint over this mean existence ever broke loose from her lips; the harder the circumstances of our life became, the braver rang her voice, the brighter her laugh. From morning till night she drew portraits of priests, of their deceased wives, sketched district maps—the Zemstvo was granted a gold medal for these maps at some exhibition. And when the orders for portraits ran out, she trimmed Paris hats for the ladies and girls of our street out of bits of stuff, straw and wire. I knew nothing of ladies' hats, but I suppose there was something humorous and comical hidden in them; for the milliner herself, as she tried the headdress which she had just made before the glass, used to choke with convulsive laughter. But I noticed that the hats had a strange influence on their buyers—having arrayed their heads with speckled hen-nests, they

walked about the streets with proudly protruding bosoms.

I worked in a lawyer's office and wrote stories for the local paper at two kopecks the line. In the evening at the tea-table, if there were no guests my wife would give me vivid descriptions of how the Emperor Alexander II visited the Girls' School in Bielostok and distributed sweets among the "noble maidens." [1]

My wife spoke to me with enthusiasm of Paris; I knew it already from different books, especially from the fine work of Maxime du Camp; she, on her side, knew the Paris of Montmartre and the hurly-burly life of the Quartier Latin. Those stories excited me far more than wine and I composed hymns to the woman, feeling that it is through love of her that the beauty of life is born. Most of all I liked when she told me of her own love-stories; she spoke of them very charmingly, with great sincerity, which, at times, rather baffled me. With great humour, in a few light words, like the trace of a finely-sharpened pencil, she would draw the comic figure of General Rhebinder, her suitor, who, having once upon a time shot an aurochs before the Tsar had had time to do so, cried after the wounded animal:

"I beg your pardon, Your Imperial Highness."

She spoke of the Russian emigrants and I always felt in her words a hidden smile of condescension. At times her sincerity approached a certain ingenuous

[1] From which some of them miraculously got into a family way and often some pretty girl would disappear while going hunting with the Tsar in the Bielorieg forest, and afterwards one would hear of her married in Petersburg. Those visits used to give food to the most marvellous legends.

cynicism; she would pass her sharp and pink tongue like that of a cat over her lips with relish and her eyes would sparkle in an uncommon way. It seemed to me sometimes that a light of fastidiousness shone in them, but oftener than otherwise I used to see her as a little girl, playing passionately with her dolls.

One day she told me:

"When a Russian is in love, he is always rather talkative and heavy—sometimes he is even repulsive, owing to his eloquence. It is only the French who know how to love beautifully—love for them is very nearly a religion."

After this I involuntarily became more careful and restrained in regard to her.

About the women of France she used to say:

"You do not always find passionate tenderness in them, but they substitute it splendidly with cheerful, elaborated sensuality. Love is their art." She used to speak of all this very seriously, in sermonising tones. It was not exactly the knowledge I sought for, but still it was some kind of knowledge, and I listened to it greedily. "Between Russian and French women there is, I think, the same difference as between fruit and sweets made of fruit," she told me on one moonlight night, as we sat in the summer house in the garden. She herself was a sweet.

She was greatly surprised when in the first days of our married life, I, in an inspiration, exposed to her my romantic ideas on the relations between man and woman.

"Are you serious? Do you really think like that?" she asked, lying in my arms, under the blue light of the moon.

Her pink body seemed transparent and an intoxicating, bitter smell of almonds emanated from it. Her long fingers played pensively with my stock of hair, she watched my face with wide-opened, anxious eyes and smiled with a certain diffidence. "Dear God," she exclaimed, jumping on to the floor, and began to walk up and down in the room, passing from light to shadow, the satin of her skin flashing in the rays of the moon, her bare feet noiselessly touching the floor. And coming up to me again and stroking my cheeks with the palms of her hands, she said, with the intonation of a mother: "You ought to have begun life with a girl, yes, yes! And not with me. . . ."

And when I took her in my arms, she began to cry softly, saying:

"You know how I love you, don't you? I have never known more joy than I have with you—that is the truth, believe me. Never have I loved so tenderly and gently, with such a light heart. I am wonderfully happy with you; but, all the same, I tell you: we have made a mistake. I am not what you need. It is I who have made the mistake. . . ."

I could not understand her, her words frightened me, and I hastily changed the trail of her thought in the joy of caresses. However, I retained those terrible words in my memory and, a few days later, after having shed tears of rapture, she repeated again, longingly:

"Oh, if only I had been a young girl. . . ."

I remember a storm raged in the garden on that night, branches of elder struck against the window panes, the wind howled like a wolf in the chimney;

it was gloomy and cold in our room and the unglued wall-paper rustled in the corners.

When we had earned a few roubles, we invited friends to come and see us, and arranged luxurious suppers for them, with meat, vodka and beer and sweet cakes, and enjoyed ourselves tremendously. My Paisian lady, who had a splendid appetite, liked Russian food: the "sitchong," a cow's stomach stuffed with buckwheat porridge and the grease of a goose; pies with codliver oil and sheatfish, potato soup with mutton.

She founded the order of "greedy little bellies." It was joined by about a dozen people, who enjoyed eating and drinking and who could indefatigably talk of the mysteries of the kitchen with æsthetic knowledge and great eloquence. I was interested in mysteries of another quality, ate very little and the process of saturation did not attract me and remained outside my æsthetical requirements. "They are futile people," I used to say of the "greedy little bellies." "As everyone is, if he is properly shaken," she would answer. "Heine has said, 'we are all naked under our clothes'!"

She knew quantities of sceptical quotations, but I did not think she always made use of them at the right moment.

She enjoyed "shaking" her neighbours of the opposite sex and did it with extreme ease. Unrelentingly cheerful, witty, supple as a snake, she could rapidly arouse a boisterous animation and excite emotions of not very superior nature. It was sufficient for a man to remain talking to her for a few minutes, and his

ears would redden, then become purple, his eyes would moisten with languor and watch her as a goat watches cabbage.

"A majestic woman!" announced a certain substitute of the lawyer, an unsuccessful nobleman who had the moles of Dmitri the Impostor and a belly as big as a cupola.

A fair-haired Jaroslav schoolboy composed poetry in her honour—always in dactylic verse. I thought the poems dreadful but she cried with laughter over them.

"Why do you provoke them?" I would ask.

"It is just as amusing as fishing trout. It is called—flirting. No woman who respects herself can do without it."

And sometimes she would ask, smiling and looking into my eyes: "Are you jealous?"

No, I was not jealous, but all this rather interfered with my life. I did not like vulgar and mean people. I was a cheerful person and knew that laughing is the best capacity of man. I thought clowns and professional comic actors very incapable people, and was certain that I could make people laugh much better than they did. And I often succeeded in making our friends laugh till they rocked with tears and pain.

"Oh, dear!" she would say then, "what a wonderful comic actor you might have made! You simply must go on the stage!"

She acted herself with success in private theatricals, and even professional theatre-managers invited her to go on the stage.

"I love the stage, but I am afraid of what is behind

the scenes," she said. She was truthful in all her thoughts, desires and words.

"You philosophise much too much," she would preach to me. "Life, after all, is simple and brutal; one ought not to complicate it by seeking for some deep meaning in it, one ought only to learn how to reduce its brutality. You will never attain more than that."

I felt that in her philosophy there was a good deal of gynecology and that "the course of obstetrics" served her as a Bible. She told me herself how stunned she was after reading the first scientific book, on leaving school.

"Being a naïve child, I felt as if a brick had been hurled on to my head, as if I had fallen from the clouds into mud; I cried pitifully because I could believe no longer, but very soon I felt harsh but firm ground under my feet. What I regretted the most was God. I felt myself so perfectly in touch with Him, and there He was—suddenly dispersed as in the smoke of a cigarette, together with Him disappearing the dream of a heavenly beatitude of Love. And in school we all thought such a lot and so well about love!"

I could not get over her girlishly Parisian nihilism. It happened in the night that I would get up from my work and go and watch her sleeping; in bed she seemed still smaller, prettier, more beautiful. I watched her and reflected with great bitterness on her distorted soul and confused existence. And my pity for her augmented my love.

Our literary tastes clashed implacably: I read rapturously Balzac, Flaubert, while she preferred Paul Feval, Octave Feuillet, Paul de Kock and especially

"La Fille Girot, Ma Femme." She considered this book to be the wittiest one she knew, although I thought it dull as a code of laws. But in spite of this, our relations were of a very fine nature—we never lost interest in each other and passion did not die out. However, on the third year of our union, I began to notice a sinister creaking in my soul which became more resounding and noticeable as time went on. I studied the whole time greedily and read a lot, uninterruptedly, and began to give myself up to literary work seriously; our guests palled more and more on me; they were all such poor-minded people, but they became more numerous, for both my wife and I earned more money and the suppers and dinners augmented consequently in number.

Life seemed to her a kind of panopticon, and as men did not carry the preserving inscription "Pray not to touch with your hands"—it happened sometimes that she approached them too incautiously and they estimated her curiosity much too much to their own advantage. Many misunderstandings arose owing to this and I always had to solve them. I did this at times rather unrestrainedly and probably not very cleverly; the man whose ears I boxed one day, complained: "Well, I will admit I was wrong! But to box my ears as if I was a mere boy, that is too much of a good thing! I am nearly twice as old as that ruffian and he pulls my ears for me! If he had only struck me—that would have been a trifle more decent!"

Apparently I did not know how to punish people in accordance with their self-respect.

My wife treated the stories I had written with a

certain indifference, but this to a certain point did not affect me: for I could not believe myself to be a serious writer and looked upon my work in the paper as a means of existence, although I often experienced already the deep waves of a strange emotion. But, one morning, as I read to her "The Old Woman Isergil" which I had written in one stroke in that night, she fell asleep. At first this did not offend me; I stopped reading and sat watching her, buried in my thoughts.

She was leaning with her small dear head on the back of the old sofa, her mouth was half-opened, and she breathed peacefully and softly, like a child. Through the elder branches the morning sun peeped into the room, its golden stains lay like flowers of air on her breast and on her knees.

I got up quickly and went into the garden, feeling painfully the deep sting of the offence and oppressed with doubts of my own capacities.

In all the days I had lived I had seen women doing the work of slavery, living in dirt and depravity, in misery or in shallow and satisfied vulgar satiety. Only one beautiful memory had I retained from my childhood, "The Queen Margot," but a whole chain of other impressions separated me from this. I thought that the history of Isergil would be appreciated by women, would excite in them the desire of beauty and freedom. And now—the woman who was nearest of all to me had remained unmoved by my story—and had fallen asleep over it.

Why was that? Did the bell which life had cast in my breast not resound loudly enough?

I had taken this woman into my heart, in the place of a mother. I had waited and believed that she would

rear me with intoxicating honey, which would rouse my creative power; I expected that her influence would soften the brutality which had been inoculated in me by life.

This was thirty years ago and I recall it all now with a smile in my heart. But at that time, the indisputable right of the human being to sleep whenever it likes had caused me to suffer intensely.

. . . . . .

I believed that if you speak gaily of things that are sad the sadness is dispelled.

And I suspected that there lived in the world a cunning Someone, who enjoyed watching people suffer: that there existed a certain evil spirit, who was the author of human dramas and an adept in ruining life. I considered the unseen dramatist as my personal enemy and tried not to get caught in his traps.

I remember reading with great indignation in Oldenburg's book, "Buddha—His Life, Learning and Society," that "every existence means—suffering." I had not experienced many of the joys of life, but the bitter cruelties of it I considered incidental, not usual. Having read carefully through the solid work of the archbishop Khrisanf, "The Religion of the East," I revolted still more at the idea that the world was based on fear, gloominess and torture and I refused to accept this to be true. And having lived intensely through a state of religious enthusiasm, I felt affronted by the fruitlessness of it. The distaste for suffering excited in me a hatred for all dramas and I learnt to turn them with great skill into light comedies.

Of course—it is not necessary to say all this in order to explain that what is usually called a "family drama," ripened gradually between the lady in question and myself, although we both tried hard to prevent it from developing. I only philosophised a little over this, in the desire to mention the curious curves of the road I followed, in my attempts to find my own self.

My wife, owing to her cheery nature, was also incapable of playing dramatic parts at home, the parts which are so attractive to super-"psychological" Russians of both sexes. Nevertheless, the gloomy dactylic verses of the white-lashed schoolboy acted on her like an autumn rain. He used to write them out carefully in a round and beautiful handwriting on little slips of paper, which he secretly stuck into anything he could get hold of—in books, hats and even in the sugar-basin. I used to find those carefully folded sheets of paper and give them to her, saying:

"Accept this new attempt to subdue your heart!"

At first these Cupid's paper arrows did not affect her; she read me aloud the verses which had no end and we laughed heartily together over the lines:

"I am with you by day and by night;
All that you do finds its way to my heart,
The touch of your hand, the bend of your head.
Your voice is like that of a tender turtle-dove,
While I, in my dreams, like a hawk turn round above you."

But one day, having read one of these boyish reports, she said, pensively: "All the same, I am sorry for him!" I remember feeling sorry for someone else,

but she, from that moment, ceased to read the poetry aloud.

The poet, a steady youth, about four years older than I, was a silent person with a tendency for drink and a marvellous capacity for sitting in one place. Coming at two o'clock for dinner, on Sundays, he would sit until two o'clock at night in motionless silence. He was a clerk at a lawyer's as I was, and used to amaze his good-natured chief by his absent-mindedness; he worked carelessly and was often wont to say in a hoarse bass voice:

"The whole thing is rubbish!"

"And what is not rubbish?"

"How shall I say?" he would ask thoughtfully, lifting his dull grey eyes to the ceiling and never added anything else. He was uncommonly, unnaturally dull; this was what aggravated me the most. He used to get slowly drunk, and then snuffled mockingly with his nose. Apart from that, I noticed nothing particular about him, for there is a law on the strength of which the man who makes love to one's wife is always a bad man.

Some rich relation from the Ukraine used to send him fifty roubles a month, which was a great sum at that time. He brought sweets to my wife every Sunday and on her name-day presented her with an alarm-clock, representing a bronze trunk of a tree on which an owl tormented an adder. This dreadful instrument always woke me up one hour and seven minutes before the time.

My wife, ceasing to flirt with the schoolboy, began treating him with the tenderness of a woman who feels herself guilty of having disturbed the peace of

a man's soul. I asked her what she thought would be the end of this sad story?

"I do not know," she answered; "I have no definite feeling for him, but I want to shake him. Something has gone to sleep in his heart and I think that I could succeed in waking that something up."

I knew she was speaking the truth: she wanted to wake up everything and everyone, and always with great success: as soon as she woke a man up—the beast would wake in him, too. I reminded her of Circe, but this did not restrain her desire to "shake" men and I could see how thick grew the flock of sheep, bulls and pigs around me.

My friends would generously come and tell me shocking and dismal legends concerning my married life, but I was straightforward and coarse and warned the authors of these stories: "Take care, or I will give you a beating."

Some of them would try to justify themselves by lying, and very few were offended by my treatment of them. And my wife used to say:

"Believe me, you will obtain nothing by brutality; people will only gossip more. As to yourself, you are not jealous, are you?"

Yes, I was too young and too confident to be jealous. But these are feelings, thoughts and conjectures, of which one speaks only with the woman one loves and with no one else. There is such an hour in the communion with a woman, when one becomes a stranger to oneself and opens one's heart to her, as a believer does before his God.

And when I imagined that all this, which belonged to me so thoroughly, she might, in an intimate mo-

ment disclose to another man, I became tormented, and it seemed to me that there was something in this that resembled treason. Perhaps it is this fear that lies at the root of all jealousy? I felt that such an existence might turn me away altogether from the road I had chosen. I had already begun to believe that no other place existed for me in the world except in literature. And under such conditions I could not work. The thing which withheld me from scandal was that in the course of my life I had learnt to treat people with tolerance without, however, losing either interest or respect for them. I knew already that all people are sinners before the unknown God of absolute truth, and that the greatest sinners before man himself are the confirmed godly creatures; they are bastards, born from the union of vice and virtue and one must note that this union does not occur owing to a violence on the part of vice over virtue—or the other way round; it is the natural result of their lawful marriage, in which ironical necessity plays the part of the priest. And marriage is a sacrament in which two brilliant contrasts, joined together, give birth nearly without exception to some kind of gloomy mediocrity. At that time I revelled in paradoxes, like a little boy in ice-creams; their sharpness excited me like good old wine and the paradoxicality of words always helped to smooth down the brutal and offensive paradox of facts.

"I think it will be better if I go," I said to my wife.

She remained thoughtful for a moment, and agreed.

"Yes, you are right! This life is not for you; I know it."

We embraced each other in silence, a little sadly;

then I left town and very soon she, too, went away, having decided to go on the stage. Thus ended the story of my first love; a very good story, in spite of its bad end.

A short time ago the woman of my first love died.

I will say it in her favour: she was a real woman. She knew how to live with what she had, but every day for her was the eve of a feast; she lived in a continual expectation that to-morrow would dawn upon a new, wonderful world, with fresh and beautiful flowers, uncommonly clever people and marvellous events. She mocked at the troubles of life, scorned them and drove them away as though they were mosquitoes. And there always lived and trembled in her soul the readiness to be amazed. This was, however, not the ingenuous rapture of a schoolgirl, but the healthy gladness of a human being who enjoys the dazzling bustle of life, the tragi-comically entangled human relations, the stream of small events, sparkling like grains of dust in the sun-rays.

I would not say that she cared for her fellow-people; no, but she liked to watch them. She sometimes complicated and hastened the development of everyday dramas between couples and lovers, skilfully exciting the jealousy of the one, contributing to the union of the other; this rather dangerous game enthralled her.

"Love and hunger govern the world, and philosophy is its plague," she used to say. "One lives for love—that is one's principal task in life."

Among our friends, there was an official of the State Bank, a long and lanky fellow, who walked about slowly and gravely like a crane. He always dressed

very elaborately and, carefully inspecting his clothes, would take off the grains of dust visible only to himself with his dry and yellow fingers. His mind was hostile to any new thought or brilliant word; it was as if they scorned his manner of speech, which was heavy and precise. He always spoke with great weight, and very impressively and before uttering a sentence, which was never to be contradicted, he would smooth down his scanty reddish whiskers with his thin cold fingers. "With time the science of chemistry will acquire a great importance in an industry working with raw materials. It is said with justice of women that they are capricious. There is no physiological difference between a wife and a mistress; the difference is merely a juridical one."

I would then ask my wife very seriously: "Can you affirm that all lawyers have got wings?"

She replied, guiltily and sadly: "Oh, no, I could not afford to do so, but I affirm that it is silly to feed elephants with boiled eggs." Our friend, after listening a short time to this dialogue, would announce sagaciously:

"It seems to me that all you say is not serious."

One day, having struck his knee painfully against the foot of the table, he winced and said with conviction: "Compactness is the indisputable property of matter. . . ."

After seeing him out, my wife, pleasantly excited, flushed and light-footed, would say, sitting down on my lap:

"Don't you see how perfectly, how entirely stupid he is. He is stupid in everything, in his gait, in his

gestures. I like him for being so unadulterated. Stroke my cheeks."

She liked when I stroked gently with my fingers the hardly perceptible lines under her dear eyes. She would press them together and stretching herself out, purr like a cat: "How interesting people are. Even then, when a man is not interesting to others, he excites me. I want to look into him as one looks into a small box; perhaps there is something hidden there, something that has not been exposed to others and has not been noticed by anyone before; I and I alone will have the privilege of seeing it."

There was no tension in her attempts to find that "what no one had seen." She looked for it with the curiosity and anticipation of a child, that enters for the first time into a room unknown to it before. And at times she actually managed to light a sharp flicker of concentrated thought in the colourless eyes of a dull person, although more often she roused the obstinate desire to possess her.

She loved her body, and standing naked before the glass, she would say with rapture: "What a splendid thing a woman is! What harmony there is in her!"

She also said:

"When I am well dressed, I feel healthier, stronger and cleverer!"

It was actually the case. She became more cheerful and witty, her eyes sparkled victoriously. She could make herself lovely dresses out of cotton print and wore them as though they had been of silk and velvet, and although she always dressed very simply, she seemed magnificently dressed to me. Women ad-

mired her clothes, of course not always sincerely, but loudly; they envied her and I remember one of them saying sadly:

"My dress is three times as expensive as yours and ten times uglier; I feel injured and hurt when I look at you!"

Women, of course, did not like her, and gossiped about us. A lady-doctor I knew, a very beautiful woman, but a very stupid one, used to warn me magnanimously: "That woman will suck all your blood out."

I learned a lot, living with the lady of my first love. But I burned, nevertheless, with the fire of desperation, noticing how irreconciliably different we were.

Life for me was a serious task; I had seen too much, thought too intensely, and lived in a perpetual anxiety. Questions, totally strange to the spirit of this fine woman, sang in a discordant choir deep in my soul.

One day, on the market-place, a policeman thrashed a fine-looking old one-eyed Jew, suspecting him of having stolen a bunch of horse-radish from a shopkeeper. I met the old man in the street. He was all covered with dust and walked along slowly, with a picturesque solemnity, his big black eye looking gravely into the empty and sultry sky while from his wounded mouth on to the long white beard ran thin little streams of blood, dyeing the silvery hair into bright red colour.

This was thirty years ago and I can still see vividly before me his glance raised to the sky in silent reproach and his eye-brows trembling like silvery threads in his old wrinkled face.

No, one does not forget the insults inflicted on a

man—and should they always remain unforgotten!

I came home, crushed and distorted with anger and grief. Such impressions somehow thrust me out of life, made me a stranger in it, a stranger to whom one exposes in order to torture him all the filthiness and the stupidity and all the horrors of the world, all the things that can injure his soul forever.

And it was in those hours, in those days, that I felt most acutely how far away from me was the being who was nearest of all to me.

When I told her of the thrashed Jew, she was greatly surprised. "And this nearly drives you mad! What a poor nervous system you must have!" And she asked: "You say he was a fine-looking old man? But how could he be fine-looking if he only had one eye?"

Every kind of suffering was hostile to her; she did not care to hear about other people's miseries; lyrical verses did not move her; compassion hardly ever was roused in her small and cheerful heart. Her favourite poets were Béranger and Heine, the man who laughed in torment.

There was something in her attitude towards life which resembled the faith of a child in the unlimited skill of a conjurer; all the tricks which have been exhibited are interesting, but the most interesting is still to come. It will be exhibited in the next few hours, perhaps to-morrow—anyhow it will be exhibited.

I think that at the moment of her death she probably still hoped to see this last, most wonderful and perfectly incomprehensible trick.

VII

I LEFT Tsaritzin in May, on the dawn of a dismal and windy day, expecting to be in Nijni in September. That was the year I had to serve off my time as a soldier. A part of the way—in the night—I used to travel with conductors of luggage-trains on the platforms of the freight-cars; the greater part I walked off on foot, earning my bread in Cossack villages, farms and monasteries. I roamed about the Don district, in the governments of Tambor and Riazan—from Riazan along the Oka; then I turned off to Moscow, and on my way decided to visit Tolstoy in Khamorniki, but at my arrival there Sofia Andreevna informed me that he had gone to the Troitzo-Sergiersk monastery. I met her in the courtyard, at the door of a shed, filled to the brim with books; she led me into the kitchen, kindly offering me a glass of coffee and a roll of bread, and among other things told me that Tolstoy was perpetually surrounded by crowds of suspicious ne'er-do-wells and that Russia altogether possessed too many of that kind of people. I had had time to notice this myself by that time, and with an easy heart politely confirmed the observation of this clever woman as being perfectly correct. It was already the end of September, and the ground was rich with heavy autumn rains, a cold wind roamed about the bristly fields, the woods were attired in their most vivid colouring; it was altogether a beauti-

ful time of the year, but rather ill arranged for travelling on foot, especially in rotten shoes.

At the Moscow luggage-platform I managed to persuade the conductor to let me into the cattle-van, in which eight bulls of Tehorkassi were being taken to Nijni to be slaughtered. Five of them behaved very decently towards me, but the others for some reason did not like my company and tried the whole time to make my life unpleasant; when they succeeded in doing so, they sniffled and bellowed in satisfied tones. The conductor, a drunken, bandy-legged little fellow with tangled whiskers, presented me with the task of feeding my travelling companions; he would thrust handfuls of hay into the car at the different stations and command me: "Offer it to them."

I spent thirty-four hours in the company of bulls, ingenuously believing that never again should I meet more brutal beasts in my life.

In my satchel I had a copy-book of verses and a wonderful poem in prose and verse, "The Song of the Old Oak." I never suffered from conceit and at that time believed myself to be very poorly educated, but I was sincerely convinced that I had written an uncommonly fine thing. I stuffed it with every idea that had got into my head during ten years of my hard and varied life and I was sure that all reading humanity, after having acquainted itself with my poem, would be gladly amazed at the novelty of all that I had imparted to it. I felt sure that the truth of my story would shatter the hearts of all people and that then we would see the beginning of an honest, pure and joyful life. I did not expect or desire anything more than that.

In Nijni lived at that time Karonin. I used to go and see him sometimes, but never dared to show him my philosophical treatise. Nikolai Elpidiforovitch was a man of very poor health and roused in me a feeling of sharp compassion, for I felt with all my soul that he was tormented with a persistent obsession.

"Perhaps it is like that," he would say, blowing thick smoke through his nostrils, then sigh deeply and add, with a smile: "And perhaps not."

His speeches always excited in me a sensation of troubled perplexity; it seemed to me that this half-tortured man had the right to speak somehow in a different, more precise fashion and that his duty was to do so. All this, and also my sincere affection for him, inspired me with a certain cautiousness in regard to this hero of Petropavlovsk, as if I feared to disturb something in him and hurt him.

I had seen him in Kazan, where he stopped for a few days on his way back from the exile. He roused in me the everlasting impression of a man who never in his life could find the place he was looking for.

"After all, it was quite unnecessary for me to come here."

These words were the first which reached my ears as I entered the gloomy room of the one-storied house in the dirty yard of a public-house for draymen. A tall, stooping man stood in the middle of the room looking pensively at the dial of a big watch which he held in his hand. A cigarette smoked between the fingers of the other one. He began walking up and down the room in long strides, answering shortly to the questions which were put to him by the landlord,

S. M. Somoff. His short-sighted, childishly clear eyes looked tired and troubled. His cheek bones and chin were adorned with a downy beard of uneven length, while on his angular skull grew the straight unwashed hair of a priest.

He was jingling some copper in the trouser-pockets of his crumpled suit, and his right hand brandished a cigarette like the stick of an orchestra conductor. His breath came in clouds of smoke; he coughed hoarsely, gloomily smacked his lips and kept continually looking at his watch. The movements of his thin, badly-built body made one realise that the man was ineffably worn out. Gradually the room filled with about a dozen dismal-looking schoolboys and students, a baker and a glazier.

Karonin spoke in the smothered voice of a consumptive, of his life in exile, of the state of mind of the political exiles. He spoke without looking at any one, as if talking to himself, often pausing for a short time between his speech and, sitting on the window-sill, fidgeting in a helpless way, for through an open casement above his head came gusts of cold air filled with the smell of manure and horse-urine. The hair on his head fluttered about, he stroked it with the long fingers of his bony hand and answered to all the questions which were showered at him. "It is possible that it is so! But I am not sure. I do not know. I cannot say."

Karonin did not appeal to the boys. They had been used to people who knew everything and who could answer everything. And the cautiousness of his manner excited an ironical estimation in them:

"A frightened crow!"

Only my friend the glazier Anatoli interpreted the honest thoughtfulness of Karonin's childish eyes and his repeated "I do not know" by another kind of fear: that of a man who knows life and who is afraid of misleading the dismal-looking kittens by telling them more than he can say in sincerity. People of real direct experience, Anatoli and I, treated the men of books with a certain lack of confidence. We knew the schoolboys well and perceived that in that moment they affected a seriousness which they did not usually have. About midnight Karonin suddenly stopped speaking, came out into the middle of the room and, standing in a cloud of smoke, rubbed his face roughly with the palms of his hands, as if washing it in invisible water. He then got his watch out of some place in his belt, carried it to his nose and said, hastily: "That's so. I must go now. My daughter is ill. Very ill. Good-bye."

He pressed the hands stretched out to him with his hot, moist hand and went unsteadily out of the room, while we started a "civil dissension," the obligatory and unavoidable consequence of all such discourses.

In Nijni, Karonin surveyed anxiously the development of the Tolstoyan movement among the "intelligentsia" and assisted in organising the colony in the government of Simkirsk. The rapid failure of this enterprise he described in the story "The Colony of Borsk." "What if you tried, too, to 'establish yourself on earth'?" he advised me. "Perhaps it might suit you."

But the deadening experiences made by the lovers of self-torture did not attract me, also I had met in Moscow one of the chief founders of the "Tolstoyan

movement," M. Novoseloff, the organiser of the Tver and Smolensk workmen's association, who afterwards became a collaborator of the "Orthodox Review" and an infuriated enemy of Lyof Tolstoy.

He was a tall man, apparently of great physical strength, and affected an extreme simplicity, bordering sometimes on coarseness of thought and manner; behind this coarseness I perceived the badly-dissimulated anger of an ambitious man. He harshly denied all "culture." This I did not like, for culture was the domain toward which I strove with great difficulty through a whole series of obstacles.

I met him in the flat of a Netchaeff man, Orloff, a translator of Leopardi and Flaubert, and one of the organisers of the splendid collection, "The Pantheon of Literature." Novoseloff was a clever, highly educated old man and spent the whole evening in turning into ridicule and pulling to pieces the "Tolstoyan movement," which at that time rather appealed to me, although I sought in it merely the possibility of temporarily finding a secluded corner in life where I could think over everything that life had taught me.

I knew, of course, that V. G. Korolenko lived in Nijni. I had read his "Dream of Makar," which, for an unknown reason, I did not like.

On a rainy day a friend with whom I was walking along the street suddenly squinted to one side and said:

"Korolenko!"

A broad-shouldered, squarely-built man was walking with a firm gait along the pavement. I could only see the curly beard of his face under the wet umbrella. That man reminded me of the Tombov

sextons and I had every reason to regard people of that breed with a certain hostility, so that I felt no desire to get acquainted with Korolenko. This desire equally did not arise after the advice given to me by a general of the secret police—one of the most amusing jokes in curious Russian life.

A few days later I was arrested and locked up in one of the four towers of the Nijni-Novgorod prison. In my round cell there was nothing of any interest, barring the inscription engraved on the door which was done up in iron. The inscription said:

"All that exists—comes from a cell."

I reflected a long time, wondering what the man who had carved this out had meant by these words. And not knowing this to be the axiom of biology I decided to consider it the sentence of a humourist.

I was called to be examined by the great General Posnansky himself, and he snorted, striking his purple swollen fist on the papers which had been taken away from me:

"I see you write verses and altogether . . . Well, after all, go on writing them. It is pleasant to read nice verses. . . ." I, too, was pleased to hear that certain truths were not inaccessible to the General. I did not think that the epithet "nice" was applied to my verses in particular. But at that time very few members of the "intelligentsia" could have acquiesced in the policeman's aphorism on verses.

I. I. Svedenzoff, a writer and an officer of the Guards, who had been in exile, spoke with great admiration of the "narodovoltzi," with particular en-

thusiasm of Vera Figner; he published gloomy stories in "fat" reviews, but when I read him the poem of Fofanoff:

> "I did not well hear what you said to me,
> But I know you said something tender . . ."

he snuffed angrily:

"What rubbish! She most probably asked him what time it was. And he, the ass, rejoiced over it. . . ." The General was a heavy man and went about in a grey waistcoat with missing buttons and in grey, stained trousers with stripes. His swollen face in its rim of white hair was all variegated with purple veins, and his watery, troubled eyes looked wistful and tired. He seemed to me to be abandoned and lonely but good-natured, reminding one of a well-bred hound who in his old age thinks it a bore to have to go on barking. I knew from the book of the speeches of A. F. Koni about the sad drama which had fallen to the General's lot; I knew that his daughter was a gifted pianist and he himself a morphine maniac. He had been the organiser and the president of the "Technical Society" in Nijni, proclaimed at the meetings of this society the importance of house industry and opened a shop on the principal street of the town where the house production of the different governments was being sold; he sent denouncements to Petersburg on the workers of the Zemstvo, on Korolenko and on the governor Baranoff, who used to indulge in that kind of thing himself. Everything that surrounded the general was untidy: dirty bed-linen dragged about behind the leather sofa; from under it peeped a dirty shoe and a piece of alabaster

of about two poods of weight. On the posts of the windows, in various cages, goldfinches, bullfinches and siskins skipped about, and the large writing-table was crowded with instruments for physical experiments. Opposite to me lay a fat French book, "The Theory of Electricity," and a volume of Schenoff's "The Reflexes of the Cephalic Brain." The old man smoked short and fat little cigarettes without interruption and their thick smoke troubled me, giving me the idea that tobacco is imbibed in morphia.

"What revolutionary are you?" he said surlily. "You are neither a Jew nor a Pole. You write—well, what of that? When I shall set you free, go and show your manuscripts to Korolenko. Do you know him? No? He is a real writer, not any worse than Turgeneff. . . ."

A heavy, oppressive smell emanated from him. He did not want to go on talking and dragged out lazily word after word with a great effort. It was very dull. I sat observing a small show-case standing next to the table in which metallic jugs were set out in rows.

The general noticed my oblique glances, got up with some difficulty and asked:

"Are you interested?"

Then he moved his chair to the show-case and, opening it, explained: "These are medals, in memory of different historical events and personalities. Here you see the taking of the Bastille, and this is in honour of Nelson's victory at Abukir. You know the history of France? Here is the union of Swiss unions and this is the famous Galvani. Look how wonderfully it is made. This is a Cuvier, considerably inferior!"

His eyeglass trembled on his purple nose, the watery eyes lighted up; he lifted each medal as carefully with his thick fingers as if it were glass instead of bronze.

"What perfect art!" he grumbled and, blowing the dust off the medals, funnily pursed up his lips.

I marvelled sincerely at the beauty of the little metallic circles and saw that the old man loved them very tenderly. Shutting up the show-case with a sigh, he asked me whether I liked singing birds? Well, in that domain I knew probably more than three generals put together. And we started an animated discussion on birds. The old man had already summoned the policeman who had to escort me to prison; an impressive quartermaster stood upright by the doorpost, while his chief still went on, smacking his lips regretfully:

"Yes, think of it only, I cannot get hold of a bee-eater! What a wonderful bird! Altogether birds are a fine people, aren't they? Well, now, off you go, bless you. . . .

"Oh, yes . . ." he remembered suddenly, "you ought to learn writing and all that, and not this. . . ."

In several days I again sat in front of the General and he muttered crossly:

"You knew, of course, where Somoff had gone off to; you ought to have told me and I would have let you out immediately. And it was quite unnecessary to scoff at the officer who searched your house. . . . Altogether . . ."

But then, suddenly, bending towards me, he asked good-naturedly: "Now, you don't catch birds any more, do you?"

About ten years after this amusing encounter with the General, I was sitting under arrest in the Nijni police-station waiting to be examined.

A young adjutant came up to me and asked:

"Do you remember General Posnansky? He was my father. He died in Tomsk. He was greatly interested in your career, watched your successes in literature and often remarked that he had been the first to perceive your talent. Not long before his death he asked me to hand over to you some medals, which you had admired. Of course if you care to have them. . . ."

I was sincerely moved. On getting out of prison I took the medals and deposited them in the museum of Nijni.

They did not accept me as a soldier. A fat, jocose doctor, who resembled slightly a butcher and disposed of everyone like a slaughterer dealing with bulls, announced after having examined me:

"You are full of holes, my fellow! Your lung is perforated! Also, you have an extended vein on your leg. Not suitable!" I was very grieved over this. Not long before the citation I made the acquaintance of a topographical-officer—I do not recall whether his name was Paskhin or Paskhaloff. He had participated in the battle of Kushka and gave vivid descriptions of the life on the border of Afghanistan. In the spring he was to start for the Pamir to work on the establishment of Russian frontiers. He was tall, nervous and sinewy and drew with great art oil-paintings, representing small, amusing pictures of military life in the style of Fedosoff. I scented in him something

contradictory and unbalanced, that which is usually called "abnormal." He kept persuading me:

"Come and join our topographic company and I will take you on to the Pamir. You will see the most beautiful thing in the world—a desert! Mountains —they are a chaos, the desert is harmony." And half-closing his big grey strangely-roving eyes, lowering to a whisper his soft caressing voice, he hummed mysteriously of the beauty of the desert, while I listened to him, stricken dumb with amazement: how could one speak so fascinatingly of a void, of unlimited sands, of unshakable silence, of sultriness and the tortures of thirst?

"That is of no consequence," he said when he heard I had failed to become a soldier. "You must address a petition, saying that you want to join the company of topographers as a volunteer and undertake to submit to the necessary examinations—and I will arrange all the rest!"

I wrote the petition, handed it, anxiously waited for the result. In a few days Paskhaloff announced to me in a somewhat confused manner: "It appears that you are politically unsafe; there is nothing to be done in that case!" And lowering his eyes he added softly: "It is a pity that you concealed this fact from me." I told him that this "fact" was equally new to me, but I think he did not believe me. He left the town very soon and some time after New Year I read in the Moscow papers that he had cut his throat with a razor in the bath.

My life went on, confused and difficult. I worked in a beer-store, rolling about barrels of beer in a damp

cellar from one place to the other, washing and closing up bottles. This filled up my whole day. Then I joined an office of a spirit factory, but on the first day of my service a greyhound belonging to the wife of the factory manager rushed at me; I killed him with a knock of my fist on the skull and was immediately discharged on this ground.

At last, on a very hard day, I decided to show my poem to V. G. Korolenko. The snowstorm had raged for three days, the streets were barricaded with snow-heaps, the roofs of the houses had attired themselves in sumptuous white head-dresses, the breeding-boxes in silvery lace nightcaps were drawn before the window-panes and in the pale sky shone a cold, dazzlingly corrosive sun.

Vladimir Galantinovich lived at the outskirts of the town in the second floor of a wooden house. On the pavement in front of the house a thick-set man in a fur hat of a peculiar shape with ear-caps, in a short, badly cut sheepskin coat reaching to his knees and heavy Viatka snow-boots, skilfully worked with a broad spade.

I clambered over the snow-heap to the entrance.

"Who is it you want?"

"Korolenko."

"That's me."

Out of a thick, curly beard, richly adorned with hoar frost, a pair of kind, brown eyes were looking at me. I did not recognise him, for on meeting him on the street I had not seen his face. Leaning on his spade, he silently listened to my explanations concerning the aim of my visit, then half-closed his eyes, as if remembering something.

"Your name is familiar. Was it not about you that I heard some two years ago from Romass? Mikheilo Antonovich. Yes, yes!" He mounted the stairs, asking me:

"Are you not cold? You are so lightly dressed."

And in a low voice, as if talking to himself:

"What a stubborn old peasant, Romass. A clever Ukrainian! Where is he now? Ah, in Viatka. . . ."

In a small corner-room, with the windows coming out into the garden, encumbered with two writing-desks, bookcases and three chairs, he wiped his wet beard with a handkerchief and turned over the pages of my thick manuscript, saying:

"I will read this, all right! What a queer handwriting; it looks simple and clear and is at the same time difficult to read."

My manuscript was lying in his lap; he kept glancing from its pages to me and back again. I felt intensely confused. "Here you have: 'zizgag.' This is . . . evidently a slip of the pen. There is no such word; it ought to be 'zigzag.'"

The small pause before the word "slip" made me realise that V. G. Korolenko was a man who knew how to spare people's pride.

"Romass wrote to me that the peasants attempted to blow him up with gunpowder and set fire to his house afterwards, wasn't it so? You lived with him at that time?" He spoke and kept turning over the pages. "Foreign words ought to be used only in case of absolute necessity; speaking in general it is better to avoid them. The Russian language is rich enough for itself and it possesses all the means of expressing the most subtle feelings and all the shades of thought."

He said all this, questioning at the same time about Romass and about the country.

"What a stern face you have!" he said all of a sudden, and asked with a smile:

"You probably find life hard?"

His soft speech differed considerably from the coarse Volga pronounciation with a stress on the "o," but I found a peculiar resemblance in him to the Volga pilot—not only in his well-set, broad-chested stature and the sharp look of a pair of intelligent eyes, but also in the good-natured calmness which is so familiar to people who observe life like the flow of a river along a sinuous bed among hidden stones and sand-banks.

"You often use coarse words, probably because you think them stronger? That happens."

I told him that I knew that coarseness was natural to me, but that I had had neither the time to enrich myself with soft words and sensations, nor the place wherein to do it.

Looking at me attentively, he continued, gently: "You write here:

" 'I came into the world, not to acquiesce.' 'That is like that'—that—like that—is wrong. It is a clumsy and unattractive form of speech. 'That is so'—do you hear?"

I heard all this for the first time and felt all the truth of his remarks.

Further it appeared in my poem that someone was sitting "like a hawk" on the ruins of a temple. "That is an unsuitable place for such an attitude, for it is not as stately as it is indecent," remarked Korolenko with a smile. Here he found another "slip" and again

and again. I was squashed by their multitude and probably became red like a burning coal. Noticing my state of mind, Korolenko laughingly told me of some mistakes made by Glieb Uspensky. This was generous, but I could listen to nothing more, and could understand nothing, only praying to be able to rush away from this shame. . . .

It is known that literary men and actors have got the self-pride of a poodle. I went away and spent the next few days in a state of absolute depression. I had been confronted with an uncommon kind of writer: he was unlike the unbalanced and kind-hearted Karonin, not mentioning the amusing Starostin. He had nothing in common with the surly Svedevzoff Ivanovich, the author of ponderous stories, who used to tell me:

"A story must strike a man's soul as though it were a stick, in order that the reader should realise what an animal he is."

There was something in these words that approached the spirit I was in. Korolenko had been the first to address to me some weighty human words on the importance of structure, on the beauty of a sentence and I was surprised at the simplicity and truth of these words. Listening to him, I perceived with a certain anguish that writing was no easy work. I sat with him for more than two hours; he told me a lot, but not a word on the essence, on the contents of my poem. And I knew already that I would hear no good of it.

About two weeks after that the little red-haired professor of statistics, Professor W. I. Deriagin, a charming and clever man, brought me the manuscript and announced to me:

"Korolenko thinks he intimidated you too much. He says you have capacities, but that one must write from nature, without philosophising. You have also got humour, although it is a trifle coarse, but that's all right. And about the poetry—he said it was delirious!" On the cover of the manuscript was written in pencil in a sharp angular writing:

"It is difficult to judge of your capacities by the 'Song'—but I think you have got them. Write about something that really happened to you and show it to me. I am not a judge of poetry; yours seems to me only confused meaning, although some lines are very strong and vivid.—V. Kor." Not a word on the contents of the manuscript. I could not understand what he had read in it, the queer man!

Two leaves flew out of the manuscript. One was a verse called "The Voice from the Mountain to the One Who Ascends," the other "The Discussion Between the Devil and the Wheel." I do not remember what they discussed; I think it was the circular motion of life. I can neither recall what the "voice from the mountain" said exactly; I tore up the verse and the manuscript, stuck them into the burning Dutch stove and pondered, sitting on the floor, as to what it could mean to write about "something that had really happened."

All that I had written in the poem had really happened to me.

And the poetry! It had got into my manuscript by mistake. It had been my little secret; I had not shown it to anyone, and did not understand it well myself. Among my friends the leather-like translations of Barikova and Likhat from Coppée, Richepin,

T. Good and similar poets were much better valued than Pushkin and still less the comedies of Fofanoff. The king of poetry then was Nekraffoff, the young admired Nadson, while the elder ones did not accept him either, and, if they did, only condescendingly. I was considered to be a serious person; weighty people, whom I sincerely respected, talked to me twice a week on the importance of house industry, on the demands of the people and the tasks of the "intelligentsia," on the rotten contagion of capitalism, which never—Oh, never—will penetrate in the Russia of peasants and socialists.

And now, everyone will know that I write delirious verses! I pitied the people who would be compelled to alter their kind and serious attitude towards me. I decided never again to write either poetry or prose and actually did not write a line during all the time of my life in Nijni—that is, for nearly two years. And sometimes the desire to write was great.

With intense grief I brought the sacrifice of all my wisdom to the altar of the "fire that purifies everything."

V. G. Korolenko stood aside from the group of the "intelligentsia" which went under the name of "radicals" and among which I felt myself like a siskin in a family of wise ravens. The favourite writer for that society was N. N. Zlatovratsky. One used to say of him: "Zlatovratsky purifies and elevates the soul." And one of the teachers of the young recommended him like that:

"Read Zlatovratsky. I know him personally; he is an honest man."

Glieb Uspensky was read attentively, although he

was suspected of a scepticism in regard to the country which was inadmissible. They read Karonin, Machtet, Zasodimsky, and inspected Potapenko.

"He seems to be all right."

Mamim-Sibiriak was greatly honoured, but one used to say that he had a "vague, undetermined tendency."

Turgeneff, Dostoievsky, Tolstoy, were still somewhere beyond the limits of interest.

Korolenko drove my friends to confusion; he had been in exile, had written the "Dream of Makar." This of course established his position. But there was in his stories something that roused suspicion, that was unfamiliar to the mind of people who had been limited to biographical literature on the country and the peasant.

"He writes from the brains," one said of him, "and the people can only be understood by the soul." Particularly disturbed were they over the splendid story, "In the Night," in which they perceived a tendency of the author in the direction of "metaphysics," and that was considered criminal. Someone of the circle of V. G.—I think it was L. I. Bodganovich—wrote a rather wicked and witty pamphlet on that story.

"R-rubbish!" said S. Somoff, stuttering a little, a man not quite in his right mind, but who possessed a certain influence among the young. "The d-description of the physiological act of birth—is the job of scientif-fic lit-terature and has nothing whatever to do with cockroaches! He im-mitates Tolstoy, that K-Korolenko!"

But the name of Korolenko rang already in all the circles of the town. He became the central figure of

cultured life and like a magnet attracted the sympathy or the hostility of all people.

"He seeks popularity," said those who were not capable of saying anything else.

At that time a considerable theft had been disclosed in the local bank of the nobility and this very usual story had the most tragic consequences: the chief culprit, a provincial "lion and lady-killer" died in prison, his wife poisoned herself with muriatic acid, having dissolved some copper in it; immediately after her burial a man who had loved her committed suicide on her grave, two more people who had been summoned before the judge on that business died one after the other, and there was a rumour that they, too, had committed suicide. V. G. published articles in the "Vostnik of the Volga" on the affairs of the bank and his articles coincided in time with these dramas; tender-hearted people began saying that Korolenko "kills people by his correspondence," and my boss, A. I. Lanin, proclaimed hotly that "there are no events in the world which are foreign to an artist."

It is known that calumny is one of the cheapest things in the world and one of the easiest. Therefore people poor of spirit generously rewarded Korolenko with the most varied kind of it.

VIII

WHEN I returned to Nijni from Tiflis V. G. Korolenko was in Petersburg.

Having no other work at hand, I wrote a few short stories and sent them to the "Voljski Vertnia" of Rheinhardt, the most important paper of the "Vovolje," owing to the permanent collaboration in it of V. G.

The stories were signed: M. G. or G—i, and were published very rapidly. Rheinhardt sent me a rather flattering letter and heaps of money, about thirty roubles. From some unknown motives, which I have now forgotten, I jealously concealed my authorship even from people with whom I was on very good terms, like N. Z. Vaisilieff and A. I. Lanin; I did not attach a great importance to these stories and certainly did not think that they would have any decisive influence on my fate. Rheinhardt, however, revealed my incognito to Korolenko and when the latter came back from Petersburg I was told that he wanted to see me.

He still lived in the same wooden house of the architect Lembke, on the outskirts of the town. I found him sitting at the tea-table in a small room with windows opening on the street, flowers on the window-sills and in the corners, and a quantity of books and papers spread all over the place. His wife and chil-

dren, having had their tea, went out for a walk. V. G. appeared to me to be still steadier, still more sure of himself, and his hair—more curly than it was before.

"We have just read your story 'About the Siskin.' So you've started publishing your things? Let me congratulate you. I see you are stubborn—you still write in allegories. Well, an allegory has its good sides, if it is witty, and obstinacy is not a bad quality either. . . ."

He said a few more affectionate words to me, looking at me under half-closed eyelids. His forehead and neck were thoroughly sunburnt, and his beard was discoloured by the sun. He wore a dark blue linen shirt with a leather belt, and black trousers stuck into high boots. It seemed as though he had come from somewhere far away and was going to go back immediately. His quiet intelligent eyes shone with courage and cheerfulness. I told him that I had written a few more stories and that one of them had been printed in the paper "the Caucasus."

"You have brought nothing with you? What a pity! You have a very peculiar way of writing. It is all a little disconnected and rough, but very curious. They say you have been going about a lot on foot? I too have been roaming the whole summer beyond the Volga, on the Kerjenetz, the Vetlodga. And you, where have you been?" After I had given him a short account of my ramblings, he exclaimed approvingly:

"By Jove, that is some walking! That is why you have become so virile in those three years. And you have probably accumulated a huge amount of strength."

I had just read his story, "The River Plays," and

had admired it very much for the beauty of its structure as well as for its contents. I had experienced a feeling of gratitude towards its author and began to speak rapturously of it. In my opinion, Korolenko had given, in the face of the ferryman Tinlin, a wonderfully accurate and a beautifully outlined image of the peasant who is a "hero for an hour." Such a man can quietly and with complete self-denial commit a deed of greatest magnanimity and directly after that thrash his own wife to death or impale his neighbour. He can captivate you with good-natured smiles and hundreds of charming words as bright as flowers, and then, without apparent reason, step on your face with his foot in a muddy shoe. Like Kozma Minin, he is capable of organising a national movement and after that "drink himself to death and go to the dogs and perish of lice." V. G. listened to my confused speech, without interrupting it, watching me attentively all the time. This intimidated me very much. At times, closing his eyes, he began striking his palm on the table, then he got up, leant his back against the wall and said, laughing good-naturedly:

"You exaggerate. Let us put it simply like this: the story is a successful one. That is enough. I will not conceal that I am pleased with it myself. But whether altogether the peasant is like Tinlin, that I do not know. But look here, you speak well, your words are strong, vivid and prominent. Here is what you get in return for your praise! And one feels that you have been reflecting a lot and seen a lot, too. I congratulate you with all my heart! With all my heart, do you hear?"

He stretched out his hand to me with corns on the

palms, probably from the axe or the oars; he enjoyed splitting wood and altogether liked all physical exercise.

"Well, tell me about what you have seen?"

And telling him about it, I broached the subject of my meetings with different seekers of truth; they walk in hundreds from town to town, from convent to convent, on the entangled roads of Russia.

Korolenko, looking out of the window on the street, said:

"They are, usually, merely miscreants. Unsuccessful heroes, disgustingly in love with themselves. Have you noticed that they are mostly evil-minded people? The majority of them do not seek 'the holy truth' at all, but only an easy way of earning their bread and also of scrambling on somebody else's neck."

Those words, although said very quietly, amazed me, revealing to me a truth of which I was vaguely conscious before.

"What good orators there are among them," continued Korolenko. "What a rich tongue they have! Some of them speak as though they were wearing silk embroideries!"

"The seekers of truth, the callers to account," those were the favourite heroes of the historical literature of the "narodniki," and here is Korolenko calling them miscreants and evil-minded ones in addition. It sounded like blasphemy, but one saw that he had thought it over carefully and decided that it was like that. And his words strengthened my opinion of the firmness of this man's soul. "Have you been on the Volyn or in the Podolje? It is very beautiful there!"

I told him of my enforced conversation with Johann

of Kronstadt, and he exclaimed excitedly: "Well, what do you think of him? What kind of a man is he?"

"He is a sincere believer, like some unwise little village priests of honest heart. I think he is awed by his own popularity. It weighs on him; he feels it to be too great a burden. One feels in him something accidental and as though he were not acting on his own will. He is continually asking his God: am I right, Almighty? and is always afraid that he is not right."

"How strange it is to hear that," says V. G. pensively. Then he began telling me his discussions with the peasants of Lukojanoff, sectarians of Korbjsnets —underlining splendidly, with a fine and clinging humour, the peculiar combination of ignorance and craft in the speeches of his interlocutors, cleverly noting the sound reason of the peasant and his cautious distrust toward every stranger.

"I think sometimes that nowhere is there such a various spiritual life as we have in Russia. And even if this is not the case, anyway the natures of our believers and thinkers are infinitely and unmatchably multifarious." He spoke imposingly of the necessity of studying the spiritual life of the country.

"This cannot be scooped by ethnography; one must approach it differently, more deeply. The country is the ground on which we all grow and it possesses a lot of thistle and uselessly growing weeds. To sow 'the reasonable, the eternal, the kind' on that ground one must act not only with prudence, but also with energy. One day during this summer I spoke to a

young man, a rather clever one, who very seriously tried to convince me that the idea of village usurers is an idea of progress, for, don't you see, the usurers accumulate capital and Russia is bound to become a capitalistic state! If such an agitator gets to the country . . ." He laughed.

Seeing me off, he again wished me luck.

"So you really think that I can write?" I asked.

"But of course!" he exclaimed, a little surprised. "You write already, you get your things printed. What more do you want? If you want advice, bring your manuscripts and we'll talk them over."

I left him with the alert sensation of a man who, after a hot day and a great fatigue, has bathed in the cool waters of a forest brook. V. G. Korolenko inspired me with a feeling of great respect but, for some reason, I felt no sympathy towards the author, and this grieved me very much. I think that this happened because at that time teachers and instructors somehow weighed upon me; I wanted some repose from them; I wanted to talk in a friendly way with a good man, simply, not feeling ashamed of all that troubled me mercilessly the whole time. And when I brought the essence of my impressions to my teachers they hacked at it and cut it up and sewed it according to the fashions and traditions of the political and philosophical theories, whose tailors and cutters they were; I knew well that they could not cut or sew differently in all sincerity, but I saw that they ruined my material. About two weeks later, I brought to Korolenko the manuscripts of the fairy-tales "Of the Fisherman and the Fairy" and of the story "The Old

Woman Isergil," which I had only just rewritten. V. G. was not at home. I left the manuscripts and the next day received from him a note.

"Come this evening to have a talk. Vl. Kor."

He met me on the stairs with an axe in his hand.

"Do not think that this is the tool of my criticism," he said, brandishing the axe. "No, I have been adjusting some shelves in the lumber-room. But a certain decapitation is awaiting you, my dear sir. . . ."

His face shone good-naturedly, his eyes smiled gaily and a smell of fresh bread emanated from him as it does from a good, healthy Russian countrywoman.

"I wrote the whole night—and went to sleep after lunch, then woke up and felt I needed a little bustling about!"

He was not at all like the man I had seen two weeks ago; one did not feel the teacher in him and the instructor. In front of me was a nice man, imbued with friendly attention towards the whole world.

"Well," he began, taking my manuscript from the table and flapping it against his knee, "I've read your fairy-tale. Had it been written by a young girl who had swallowed too much of de Musset, and in the translation of our Missovskaia—the dear old lady—I would have told the young woman: It is not bad—but, all the same, make haste and get married. But for the fierce young giant that you are, writing gentle verses is rather abominable; in any case it is criminal. When did you break out with them?"

"It was in Tiflis. . . ."

"Hah! That's what it is! A kind of pessimism rings in it. You must remember that to think pessimistically of love is a sickness of youth—it is a

theory more contradictory to practice than all other theories. We know you, you old pessimists; we've heard something about you!"

He winked at me cunningly, and continued very earnestly:

"Out of this funeral service one can publish only the verses; they are interesting. That I will arrange for you. 'The Old Woman' is written considerably better, more earnestly, but again and again you bring in allegory. That won't be any good to you. Have you been in prison? Well, you'll be put in again for sure!" He stopped thoughtfully, turning over the manuscript. "What a peculiar thing this is! It's romanticism—which has been dead long ago. And I doubt very much that this Lazarus ought to be resurrected. It seems to me that you sing in a voice that is not your own. You are a realist, not a romanticist; do you hear, a realist! As to details, there is a place there about a Pole. I think it is very personal, is it not?"

"It is possible."

"Ah, you see? I tell you—we know something about you! But that cannot be allowed; strike out everything personal! I mean of course everything narrowly personal."

He spoke gaily and enthusiastically, his eyes shone brilliantly; I watched him in amazement, like a man I was seeing for the first time. He threw the manuscript on the table, brought his chair nearer to me and put his hand on my knee.

"Look here, can I speak openly to you? I know you very little, I hear a lot about you—and can notice some things myself. You live badly. You haven't

hit on the right place. I think you ought to get away from here and marry a nice, clever young girl."

"But I am married already!"

"That is exactly what is wrong about you."

I said to him that I did not want to discuss that topic. "Oh, well, then forgive me." He began joking and making fun of me, then all of a sudden asked anxiously:

"Oh, yes, have you heard that Romass is arrested? Long ago, is it? Really?"

"I had no idea of it and heard of it only yesterday. Where, in Smolensk? What was he doing there?"

In Romass's flat they had arrested the printing office of the "narodopravtzi" which he had organised.

"What a restless person he is!" V. G. remarked pensively. "Now again he shall be exiled somewhere. How is he, well? He was such a strong peasant. . . ."

He sighed and shrugged his shoulders.

"No, no, all this is not what is wanted! You will not attain anything in that way. The case of Astirev is a good lesson—it shows to us that we must start rough legal work, the everyday work of culture. Autocracy is a decayed but strong truth—its root is branchy and has grown inside very deeply. Our generation will not succeed in pulling it out. We must at first attempt to shake it, and for this we need more than ten years of legal work."

He spoke a long time on this topic, and one felt that he was talking of something that was the faith of his life.

Avdotia Semenovna came in; the children began

racketing about. I said good-bye and went away with my heart at rest.

Everyone knows that in the province one lives under a glass cover. People learn everything about you. They know what you were thinking of on Wednesday about two o'clock and on Saturday after evening mass; they know all your secret intentions and are very angry if you do not justify the prophecies and premonitions.

The whole town heard of course that Korolenko was well disposed towards me, and I had to listen to many advices of the following kind: "Take care, this crowd of people 'who have become wise' will finish by leading you astray."

They meant the story of P. D. Boborikin that was very popular at that time: "The man who became wise," about a revolutionary who undertook legal work in the Zemstvo, after having lost his umbrella and been forsaken by his wife.

"You are a democrat; there is nothing that these generals can teach you. You are a son of the people," they suggested to me.

But I had felt myself a long time to be a stepson of the people. This feeling was strengthened by years and, as I said already, the people-worshippers themselves appeared to me to be also such stepsons. When I pointed to this they shouted at me: "You see, you are infected by them already."

A group of students from the Jaroslav Lyceum invited me to a party where I read something to them; they poured vodka and beer into my glass, trying to do it unnoticed. I perceived their little artful devices, understood that they wanted to get me "drunk as a

sailor," but could not see what they needed it for. One of them, a self-loving consumptive, tried to convince me:

"First of all—send to the devil all ideas, ideals and all that rubbish! Write simply! Down with ideas. . . ."

All these advices bored me intensely.

V. G. Korolenko, like all noticeable people, underwent various criticisms on the part of the inhabitants of the town. Some of them, sincerely appreciating his attentive treatment of man, attempted to involve the author in their small personal affairs, others made him the object of light slander.

My friends did not admire his stories very much.

"That Korolenko of yours—he seems even to believe in God," they told me. For some reason the story they disliked the most was "Behind the Image." They found it was mere "ethnography." "Pavel Jakoushkin already wrote like that."

They affirmed that the figure of the hero-shoemaker was taken from the "Customs of the Street Rasterjajevskaia," by Glieb Uspensky. Altogether the critics reminded me of a Voronej monk, who, having listened to a detailed description of the voyage of Mikhlukha-Maclay, asked angrily and wonderingly:

"But allow me! You said that he brought a Papuan to Russia! But why exactly a Papuan? And also, why only one?"

. . . . . .

Early in the morning I was returning from the field where I had spent the night, and met V. G. at the entrance of his flat.

"Where do you come from?" he asked, surprised. "I am going out for a walk! What a splendid morning! Come on with me!" He too had evidently not slept that night; his eyes were inflamed and dry and had a tired look in them; his beard was all crumpled up and he was untidily dressed.

"I've read in the 'Volgar' your 'Grandfather Arhip.' It is not a bad thing; one can publish it in a magazine. Why didn't you show it to me before publishing it? And why don't you come to see me?"

I told him that he had repulsed me by the way in which he had lent me three roubles some time ago; he had handed me the money in silence, with his back turned to me. This had offended me. It is so hard to borrow money; I had recourse to that only in case of extreme necessity. He grew thoughtful and frowned. "I can't recall it! Of course, since you say it —it means that it is true. But you must forgive my rudeness; I probably was in a bad temper. This happens rather often to me lately. I suddenly get in my thoughts, as though I had sunk down into a well. I neither see nor hear anything, but just listen to something with great tension." He drew his hand under my arm and looked into my eyes.

"Forget this, please. You have no reason to be offended, for I feel very friendly towards you, but that you got offended altogether, is well. We are usually not liable to get offended; that is what is wrong with us. Well, let us forget this. Look here, what I wanted to tell you. You write a lot, hastily; very often one notices a certain unfinished touch in your stories, a certain unclearness. In the 'Arhip,' for instance, that place where you describe the rain is

neither in verse nor in rhythmical prose. That is not right."

He spoke a lot and in a very detailed way of the other stories. It was clear that he read with great attention all that I published. This, of course, touched me immensely. "We must help each other," he said in answer to the gratitude I expressed. "We are not many! And we are all hard up!" He lowered his voice, and asked: "Have you heard, is it true that in the case of Nathenson, Romass and the other, a girl Istomina has been mixed up?"

I knew that girl. I had become acquainted with her, having dragged her out of the Volga, into which she had thrown herself from the stern of a flatboat. It was easy enough, for she had chosen a shallow place to drown herself. She was a colourless, rather silly little creature, with an inclination to be hysterical and an abnormal liking for lies. Afterwards she was, I think, a governess at the house of Stolypine in Saratoff and was killed with the others by the bomb of Maximalists at the explosion of the minister's house on the Aptekarsky Island.

Having heard my story, V. G. said, in a rather furious tone: "It is criminal to involve children in such a risky business. I met this young girl about four years ago or more. She did not seem to me to be like what you picture her. She was simply a rather nice little thing, troubled by the obvious lies of life. She might have become a good village teacher. They say she spoke too much at the interrogations? But what could she know? No, I cannot justify this sacrificing of children to the God of politics."

He walked on quickly, but my feet ached. I stumbled and hung back.

"What is the matter with you?"

"I've got rheumatism."

"You begin early! No, you spoke wrong of the girl, in my opinion. But altogether you are a good reciter. Look here, try and write something bigger, for a review. It is time for you to do it. They will publish you in a review and I hope then you'll treat yourself with greater earnestness." I do not think he ever spoke to me so charmingly as he did on that splendid morning, after two days of uninterrupted rain, in the middle of a refreshed field.

We sat for a long time on the edge of the ravine by the Jewish cemetery, admiring the emerald of the dew on the leaves of the trees and on the grass. He told me of the tragi-comical life of the Jews in the "line of settledness," [1] and under his eyes grew the shadows of weariness. It was already nine o'clock when we returned to town. Saying good-bye, he reminded me:

"So you promise to try and write a long story, eh?"

I came home and sat down immediately to write the "Tchelkash," the story of a tramp from Odessa, who was my neighbour in the hospital of Nikolaeff. I wrote it in two days and sent the rough manuscript to V. G. In a few days he brought some injured peasants to my chief, and heartily, as he alone could do it, congratulated me, saying: "You have written a good thing, quite a good story! It is all made of one piece. . . ."

[1] The region where the Jews were allowed to live in Russia unhindered.

I was greatly confused by his praise. In the evening, sitting astride on a chair in his little study, he spoke animatedly:

"It is not bad at all! You know how to create characters; the people with you speak and act for themselves from their own essence; you manage not to mix in the stream of their thought the game of their feelings. Not every one succeeds in this! And the best thing of all is that you appreciate a man, such as he actually is. I told you long ago that you were a realist."

But after some reflection he added: "But a romanticist at the same time! And look here: you have been here for a quarter of an hour and you are smoking your fourth cigarette. . . ."

"I am greatly excited."

"That is unnecessary. You are always a little excited; that's why, probably, people say that you drink. You are all bones and no flesh. You smoke without particular pleasure. What is the matter with you?"

"I don't know."

"And do you really drink, as they say?"

"No, that's a lie."

"And about your having orgies over there at your place. . . ." And laughing, looking at me searchingly all the time, he told me of some quite ingeniously concocted slander in my regard.

And then said memorably:

"When someone thrusts himself a trifle forward—he is thrashed on the head to prevent him, at any rate, from going any further; that is a sentence of a student from Petersburg. Well, now—set all rubbish aside, however much you care for it. We shall publish

the 'Tchelkash' in the 'Russkoje Bogatstvo' and on the first page; that will be an honour and a distinction. You have a few collisions with grammar in your manuscript which are unfavourable to the latter; I have corrected that. I haven't touched anything else. Do you want to see?"

I refused, of course.

Walking up and down the room, rubbing his hands, he said:

"I rejoice so sincerely over your success." I felt the captivating sincerity of his joy and admired this man who spoke of literature as of a woman whom one loves with a strong, peaceful love—forever. I will never forget how happy I was at that moment with the pilot. I silently watched his eyes; there shone in them such a lot of kind gladness over man.

The gladness over man—it is so rarely experienced by people, although it is the greatest gladness on earth! Korolenko stopped in front of me and laid his heavy hands on my shoulders.

"Look here, don't you want to go away from here? To Samara, for instance? I have a friend there in the Samara paper; if you like, I shall write to him telling him to give you some work? Shall I?"

"Do I stand in somebody's way here?"

"No, but people stand in your way. . . ."

It was clear that he believed the stories about my drinking, about the orgies in "the bath-house," and altogether about my "vicious" life, the greatest vice of which was poverty. The persistent advices of V. G., insisting that I should leave the town, somehow offended me, but at the same time his desire to draw me out of the depths of vice touched me to the

core. Greatly moved, I told him everything about my life. He listened to me in silence and frowned, shrugging his shoulders. "But you must see for yourself that this is all quite impossible and that you are a stranger in all this phantasy. Now really, do as I tell you! It is absolutely necessary that you should go away, change the train of your life. . . ."

He persuaded me to do so.

. . . . . .

Afterwards, when I wrote in the "Samara paper" bad every-day feuilletons, signing them by the fine pseudonym Aegudiil Khlamida, Korolenko used to send me letters, criticising my work mockingly, severely, impressingly—but always with a great friendly feeling towards me.

I remember especially well such an occasion: I was bored to repulsion by a poet who wore a name fatal to him: Skukin.[1] He used to send me his works to the editor's office by the yards. They displayed a hopeless ignorance and were abominably mean; it was impossible to print them. The thirst for glory inspired this man with an original idea: he had his verses printed on separate rose-coloured leaves and distributed them in the different groceries in town; the boys at the counter wrapped tea, packets of candies, conserves and sausage in them, and in that way the customers received as a prize for their purchase about half a yard of verses, extolling the town authorities, the marshal, the nobility, the governor and the bishop.

All those people were remarkable in their own way

[1] Skuka = dullness.

and were quite worthy of attention, but the bishop was an especially noticeable figure. He had forced a young Tartar girl to get baptised, which nearly provoked a revolt in a whole district of Tartars; he organised a perfectly idiotical case against "Khlisti," [1] in which many quite innocent people (their innocence was known to me) were sentenced. His most glorious deed was the following one: during a drive in his diocese in bad weather his carriage broke down near a small forsaken village and he had to wait in the hut of a peasant. There on a shelf near the images he noticed a clay figure of Zeus; this of course surprised him. On investigations and inquiries in other huts it was proved that the image of the lord of Olympus, as well as a statuette of the goddess Venus, was to be found at the house of other peasants as well, but none of them wanted to say where they came from.

This was sufficient to get up a criminal case on the sect of the pagans of Samara, who worship the gods of ancient Rome. The pagans were imprisoned, and remained there until the investigation established that they had killed and robbed a merchant of clay figures in the Soldatskaia Sohoda in Viatka and distributed among each other the gods in a friendly fashion. That was all.

In one word, I was displeased with the governor, the bishop, the town, the world, my own self and many other things. So, in a state of irritation and anger, I called the poet who had sung the praise of the people I hated unpleasant names by adding to his name Skukin, the word—son.[2]

[1] Religious sect.

[2] Skukin—Sukin: that of a dog.

V. G. immediately sent me a reproaching letter, saying that even when in one's right one should always have a sense of measure when abusing people. It was a fine letter, but it was taken away from me by policemen during a search and disappeared together with other letters of Korolenko.

By the way, a few words on the policemen.

I was arrested in Nijni early in the spring of 1897 and not very politely transferred to Tiflis. There in the Castle of Metekh the Colonel Konissky, who afterwards became the Chief of the Petersburg Police Station, interrogating me, said sullenly:

"What fine letters Korolenko writes to you, and he is the best writer in Russia now."

He was a strange man, that officer: he was small, had soft, cautious, undecided movements and a hideously large nose mournfully bent down. His eyes were quite foreign to his face and the pupils very queerly tried to conceal themselves in the bridge of his nose.

"I am a countryman of Korolenko's—I also come from the Volynic—and I am a descendant of that bishop Koniszky, who—do you remember?—made that famous speech to Catherine the Second: 'Let us leave the sun,' etc. . . . I am proud of it."

I politely inquired who roused greater pride in him, the ancestor or the countryman?

"Both, of course, both," he said. He drew the pupils of his eyes quite into his nose, but they shortened and then immediately went back to their place. Feeling ill and therefore angry, I remarked that the pride of a man with whose life the excessively polite

attention of policemen interfered so much was not clear to me.

Koniszky answered piously: "Every one of us acts on the will of the Almighty, every one of us! Now, let us continue. So you affirm, although we know it to be. . . ."

We were sitting in a small room above the gate of the castle. The window was situated very high upon the wall under the ceiling, and through it, onto the table crowded with papers, fell a ray of warm sun, and among other things threw its light to my shame onto the slip of paper on which I had written out distinctly:

"Do not reproach the sturgeon when it is told: now, stir, John!" I looked at the confounded paper and wondered:

"What shall I answer to the officer when he asks me about the meaning of this sentence?"

For six years—from 1895-1901—I did not meet Vladimir Galaktionovich, and only seldom corresponded with him.

In 1901 I came for the first time to Petersburg, the town of straight lines and crooked-minded people. I was "the fashion"; "glory" besieged me, interfering with my life. My popularity went very deep. I remember one night, as I was coming home by the Anidkoff bridge, I was overtaken by two men, evidently hair-dressers, and one of them, peering into my face, whispered in a frightened way to his friend:

"Look—that's Gorki."

The other one stopped, looked at me attentively

from head to foot and, letting me pass, murmured rapturously: "Hah, the old devil—walks about in rubber shoes!"

Among other pleasures, I had my photograph taken together with a group of the members of the editor's office of the review "Natchalo." Among them was the provocator and secret agent, M. Gurovich. Of course it was very pleasant to see the kind smiles of the women, the adoring glances of the young girls and, probably like all young people winged with glory, I resembled rather an Indian cock.

But in the nights, when I was alone, I suddenly felt myself like an escaped criminal surrounded by secret agents, judges and spies who all behave as though they considered the crime to be a misfortune, a "sad mistake" of youth, and only await that he should plead guilty; then they will all generously forgive him. But in the secret depths of their hearts they all have the invincible desire to catch the criminal *en flagrant délit* and shout out victoriously:

"Hah, we've got you!"

Often I had to stand as a schoolboy who is being examined in all matters of science.

"'What do you believe in?" questioned the sectarians and the priests of the temples. Being of an amiable disposition, I allowed myself to be examined with a patience which amazed me, but after this torture of words I experienced the desire to poke the needle of the Admiralty through the Isaacs Cathedral or do something equally scandalous. Somewhere, behind a certain good nature, nearly always an affected one, Russians conceal something slightly resembling bounderism. This quality—or is it perhaps a means

of investigation?—expresses itself very variedly, chiefly though in an aspiration to visit the soul of your neighbour as one visits a fair, watch the conjuring tricks that are being exhibited in it, throw things about in it and trample them, sow trifles in a stranger's soul and sometimes overturn something in it. And, like the unbelieving Thomas, poke one's fingers in the wounds, presuming most probably that the scepticism of the Apostle is equal to the curiosity of monkeys.

. . . . . .

V. G. Korolenko found even among the stone buildings of Petersburg a small old wooden house, with provincial cosiness in it, whitewashed ceilings and the tender aroma of antiquity. He had become grey in these years, the curls of hair on the temples were nearly white, wrinkles had appeared under the eyes and their look was absent-minded and weary. I felt immediately that his calmness, which had formerly so appealed to me, had given place to the extreme nervousness of a man who lives in a continual tension of the soul.

Apparently, the Multon case had cost him a lot, as well as all the other things which he had dragged about like a bear in those hard years.

"I suffer with insomnia; it bores me terribly. And you see, in spite of consumption, smoke as much as ever. How are your lungs? I am going to the Black Sea; let's go together!"

He sat down at the table in front of me and, peeping from behind the kettle, spoke of my work.

"Things like 'Varanka Olessova' you manage better than 'Thomas Cordeeff.' That novel is hard to read; it has a lot of material and no order, no smoothness."

He straightened himself out so that his spine cracked, and asked:

"Well, have you become a Marxist?"

When I told him that I was very near it he smiled sadly and remarked: "I can't understand it. Socialism without idealism—I cannot conceive. And I do not think that one can build ethics on the consciousness of mutual material interests—and we cannot do without ethics."

And, sipping his tea, he asked: "Well, and how do you like Petersburg?"

"The town is far more interesting than the people."

"The people here . . ."

He lifted his eyebrows and rubbed hard his tired eyes.

"The people here are more European than in Moscow or on our Volga. They say that Moscow has more character—I don't know. To my opinion her peculiar character is a clumsy one—it is tough and conservative. The spirit of the Slavophiles, Katnoff and the others, and their spirit reigns there—here—the Dekabrists, the Petrashevsky people, Chernishevsky . . ."

"Pobedonoszeff," I put in. "Marxists," added V. G., with a laugh. "And altogether every kind of thought sharpened by progress, which means revolution. And Pobedonoszeff is gifted, you may say what you like. Have you read his 'Moscow Review'? You notice that it is a Muscovite one, all the same!"

He got nervously animated and began speaking with

humour of the struggle of literary circles, of the discussions between the "narodniki" and the Marxists.

I knew something of it already. On the next day after my arrival in Petersburg I had been involved in an "affair" which even now I recall with displeasure. I had come to V. G. to talk with him, among other things, on this matter.

The affair was such: the editor of the "Jisu" (Life), V. A. Posse, had organised a literary evening in honour and in memory of M. G. Chernishevsky and had invited V. G. Korolenko, N. K. Michailovsky, P. F. Menshin, P. B. Struve, M. I. Zugan-Baranovsky and several other Marxists and "narodniki" to take part in it. The literary men had consented. The police had allowed it.

On the next day, on my arrival at Petersburg two smart students together with a coquettish young lady, came to see me and declared that they could not allow Posse to take part in a feast in honour of Chernishevsky, for "Posse is not accepted by the studying youth, he exploits the editors of the review 'Jisu.'" I knew Posse for about a year, considered him a man of original talent, but not to the point of being able to exploit the editors. I knew his relations with them to be very friendly; he worked like a drayman's horse and, being very poorly paid, lived with his large family a life of starvation. When I told all this to the young people they began to speak of the vague political position of Posse between the "narodniki" and the Marxists, but I remarked to them that he was aware of this vagueness himself and therefore signed his articles by the pseudonym Wilde. The guardians of morality and orthodoxy got angry with me and went away, say-

ing that they would go pleading before all the participators in the evening, imploring them to refuse to appear at it. "It came out, later on, that the incident in its substance" was to be regarded not like a personal action against Posse, but like "one of the acts of struggle between two directions of political thought." The young Marxists found that it was not suitable that their representatives should appear before the public next to the representatives of the "narodnichestno," the "languishing" and "extenuated." All this wisdom was stated to me in a letter, detailed like an official report and written in such a language that I felt myself a foreigner as I read it. Together with that letter that came from people of whom I had no idea, I received a note from P. B. Struve. He informed me that he refused to appear at the evening, and a few hours later, again in a note, declared that he took his refusal back. But the next day it was M. I. Zugan-Baranovsky who refused to take part in the evening, and Struve sent a third note with a final refusal, and, as in the previous ones, without giving the motives on the strength of which he was acting like that.

V. G., smiling, listened to my story about all this rubbish and said, with a sad kind of humour:

"There, you see—one can be invited to read something and then as soon as you get to the stage you'll be seized, your trousers will be pulled off and you'll get a jolly licking!" Walking up and down the room, his hands behind his back, he continued, speaking low and thoughtfully: "What hard times! Something strange and corrupting is developing among us. I cannot understand the state of mind of the youth. I

think that a certain nihilism reigns again among them and that there exists a category of socialists of career. Autocracy is undermining Russia. But a power that would take its place is not to be seen."

It was the first time that I saw Korolenko looking so preoccupied and weary. That filled me with sadness.

Some Zemstvo people from the provinces came to see him and I went away. A day or two later he left the town to go and have a rest somewhere, and I do not remember having come together with him again after this meeting.

THE END